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THE

BANE OF A LIFE.

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BANE OF A LIFE.

A Robel.

BY

THOMAS WRIGHT

(THE "JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER").

AUTHOR OF "SOME HABITS AND CUSTOMS OF THE WORKING CLASSES,"
"JOHNNY ROBINSON," "THE GREAT UNWASHED," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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TO

MY FELLOW MEMBERS

OF THE

COSY CLUB

g dedicate this Work,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR MANY PLEASANT MEETINGS

PAST, AND THE HOPE OF MANY EQUALLY

PLEASANT ONES TO COME.

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PREFACE.

HAVE an idea (I hope it is an erroneous one) to the effect that, for a novel to have a preface, is a bad sign—for the novel.

But after giving much anxious consideration of this theory, I have come to the conclusion that, in the present instance, a prefatory explanation will be a lesser evil (to the author) than the publication of the work without any such introduction would be. Hence the present preface, which—though I do not want to write a chapter of autobiography—will have to take a somewhat autobiographical form.

When my first book, "Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes," came out, I knew nothing of the inner life of literature (I do not know much about it yet), and was therefore greatly surprised to find people from all parts of the country writing to me, through my

publishers, concerning the book. With one exception—the epistle of a clergyman, who, to judge from what he wrote, appeared to have a type of mind unpleasantly akin to that of Mr. Broadhead, of Trade-Union outrage notorietythese letters were all written in a friendly spirit. and the burden of them was-"Give us a novel of working-class life." This request exactly jumped with my own secret desire, and encouraged by it, I said to myself, "I will give the public a novel of working-class life." It will readily be understood that while in this warm mood I also said to myself, that it should be none of your commonplace novels; that it should be a novel not merely even to blaze the comet of a season —that was to be its least triumph; but a novel This was how I spoke to myself in the enthusiastic day-dream, conjured up by friendly letters and favourable reviews; but alas! when with a view to carrying out my dream, I faced reality, I found that even hope would not tell a flattering tale.

At this time, sensation was all the rage in fictional literature, and, on self-examination, I found that I had not the sensational faculty. I have heard it spoken of as a very low faculty,

but I must confess that it was a matter of regret to me to find that I did not possess it. For many days and nights I racked my brains trying to hit upon a plot that would admit of the introduction of the beautiful golden-haired fiend, and man-eating, lady-killing, muscular hero, who were the (novel) lions of the day. But no such plot would come at my call, and I was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that—

"The moving accident was not my trade, To freeze the blood I had no ready art."

Finding then, that I could not go with the taste of the age, and knowing that I had no spark of the genius that can create a taste for its own productions, I abandoned the idea of writing a novel, and wrote instead a story ("Johnny Robinson)" of working-class school life. The publication of this work again brought me letters suggesting that I should write a novel, and again I weighed the subject very anxiously, and with an ardent desire to carry out the suggestion of my unknown friends. But while I could see there were phases of life among the working-class that would afford material for a stirring novel, I was aware that those phases had already

been used for the purposes of fiction, by far abler hands than mine—by Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Charles Reade, William Gilbert (the author of "De Profundis"), and others. In the face of this, and the rage for sensation continuing, I again gave up the idea of a novel.

Later, another book of mine, "The Great Unwashed," was published, and once more came the letters urging me to attempt a novel. Some of the writers now became a little detailed. "Give us," said one, "a continuation of 'Johnny Robinson,' the further story of his life as an apprentice and journeyman?" while another expressed a very positive opinion that I would meet with success if I would only work in a few such scenes as those given of an artisan's home-life in "Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes."

Others, too, offered hints that served to show me that it was rather a domestic than a sensational novel that they had in view. At the same time my own desire to write a novel remained; the working classes was one of the topics of the day, and novel-readers were beginning to show signs of being rather over-dosed with sensation. Now or never, therefore, I said to myself, is my time, and I decided that, my publisher being willing, I would attempt a quiet story, illustrative of some of the phases of social life and modes of thought existing among the middle working-class. On consulting him, I found that my publisher was willing, nay, more than willing—encouraging. I accordingly set about the composition of the present work, venturing to hope that its want of thrill and mystery might be considered as in some degree at oned for by a something of freshness (to novel-readers) in the scenes and characters attempted to be depicted in it.

From the above explanation it will be seen that this is, to some extent, a novel of purpose. How far I have succeeded in that purpose, or whether in any case it is a purpose of sufficient interest or importance to justify the publication of a novel, are questions for critics and readers to decide.

In so far as its story is the story of his life, Harry Mason is the hero of the work, and he is so very unheroic a one compared with the popular ladies' guardsman type of hero, that on my own behalf I feel constrained to mention that the story of the book is more than merely

founded on facts. With the exception of the alteration of names and localities, and the generalization—not affecting the main circumstances or the conduct of the actors in relation to them—absolutely necessary for the purposes of construction—it is the story of real lives, and every character in it is drawn from life.

Though it is throughout essentially a story of working-class life, I have laid the chief scenes of it, not in any of the large manufacturing centres, but—with a view to having the local colour in keeping with the quiet character of the plot—in one of the smaller county towns; but the people introduced are so far typical that they are such as are to be found alike in large and small towns.

GREENWICH.

June 6th, 1870.

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THE BANE OF A LIFE.

Prologue.- & Time of Trinl.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASONS.

HERE you go again! Drat you, Joe, what are you grinning at?"

Mrs. Mason, the speaker who gave vent to the above exclamation was of the fat, fair, and forty type; plump, rosy, and handsome in the matronly style. The kind of person who would strike you as being upon the whole a nice, motherly sort of woman, though capable, if occasion called for it, of displaying a degree of strength of will not always found in the nice, motherly type of character.

As she spoke she glanced at her husband, who, seated in company with his son and daughter, was making what most people would have considered a more than hearty breakfast; while she was engaged in tying up a pile of

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eatables which, as regarded quantity, a stranger would have been more likely to have taken to be the supply for a moderate-sized picnic party, than for what it really was, Joe's provisions—technically known as "bagging"—for the remainder of the day. Being a robust fellow, and following the appetizing occupation of a railway stoker, Joe was certainly a great eater, a circumstance that sometimes induced his wife to jestingly observe, that those who had him to feed had no sin in his wages. But to this thrust he would reply by observing that though he certainly could eat a bit, he wasn't dainty, being always satisfied with a good rough filling of anything better than a bran mash.

Joe was at all times a pleasant tempered fellow, but never before had he been seen in such a smiling, self-satisfied, and withal mysterious mood as that in which his family found him on this bright June morning in 1862. During breakfast he had done little else than chuckle, and though as a rule it is pleasant to see people in a good humour with themselves, such a sight is apt to become irritating when the self-satisfaction comes to be expressed in a series of hand-rubbings and half-smothered bursts of laughter, and arises from some cause unexplained to the looker-on, especially if the latter is a person who has a claim upon the confidence of those who are thus moved to mirth.

It was therefore with something of impatience in her voice that Mrs. Mason asked "what are you grinning at?" but it was with perfectly unruffled temper and a smile upon his face broad enough to justify his wife in speaking of it as a grin, that he exclaimed by way of reply, "Well, I'm blest; I thought this was a land of liberty; I hope you aren't going to charge us anything for laughing?"

"Well, no," answered the wife, falling into Joe's bantering strain as her momentary irritation passed away, "not if there was anything to laugh at, but I can't see that there was anything for you to be grin—grinning about all morning."

"Well, there wasn't a great deal, after all, lass," said Joe, "but still there was something. I've got a bit of news for you as I think'll make you inclined to laugh on the right side of your face. I go on driving to-day."

"No, but do you though for sure?" she exclaimed, making a step towards him and speaking in a quick, joyous tone, which, as well as the bright flush on her face, showed how interested she was in the information.

"Yes, for sure," answered Joe; "the additional trains commence to run this morning, you know it's the first of the month. And so, when our train came in last night, the foreman of the shed came to me and he says, 'Joe, it's been decided to put on two more drivers for the new trains, and

you and Davy Davies are to be the men, so you'll take the first extra luggage to-morrow, and good luck go with you, old chap.' Of course I thanked him kindly," concluded Joe, "and now here we are, getting on like a house a-fire."

"Well, it's only your right, my lad," said Mrs. Mason, in a tone and manner indicative of her being under the impression that she owed it to herself to say something that should appear cool, as a set-off to the excitement she had just shown.

"That's true enough," said Joe, "but then people don't always get their rights nowadays.especially on railways. It's only the big jobs as gets talked about, but jobbery on them often goes down as far as such an affair as this, and it was a thing of this sort that tickled me so much just now. I was thinking of how Dick Smith will look when he hears this." "I suppose he built on getting the job through his fine friend the director that he talks about so much?" said Mrs. Mason, "He did so," said Joe, "and questioningly. what's more, he would have got it too, only the foreman of the shed gave some of the big guns a hint that it would hardly do to put a crackbrained character like Dick in charge of an engine so soon after the inquiry about the smash on the S.S.W. Directors aren't any better than they should be, I can tell you."

"If only half as is said about them is true,

I should think that they weren't as good as they might easily be, without being over and above honest either."

"Well, at any rate, my dear," said Joe, smiling, "the number of poor relations that some of them seem to have, and the way in which such relations always turn up when there happens to be a vacancy, is something wonderful; and directors' gospel is, If you can help a poor friend without putting your hand into your own pocket, it's a Christian duty to do it. But, of course, shareholders who don't get interest for their money, or fellows who get done out of their promotion, don't see it in that way. They call it jobbery, though why they shouldn't call it plain robbery, I can't tell. There's only the difference of a letter between 'em on paper, and none at all in reality, without it is that the jobbery sort of robbery is more sneaking, and does more harm, and is more deserving of being transported for than straightfor'ard pocket-picking or housebreaking."

"Well, Dick hasn't got the job, so you needn't care," said the wife, cutting short Joe's harangue. "No, I shan't care," he replied, in an off-handed way, "though he'll be coming out strong the first time he gets a glass too much. He'll be going to tear the line up, or pull the trains back, or shoot the manager, or some other great thing."

"That's the way he'll talk," said Mrs. Mason,

in a contemptuous tone, "but what he'll do will be to get on the spree for two or three days, and if he gets sacked for losing time, go whining to his friend for letters to beg him back. But never mind him, let us talk about ourselves. It'll be a rise of two shillings a day right off, wont it?"

"Yes," said Joe, "and then we'll see if we can't get a house out of the Building Society, and—"

"Now just shut your mouth," interrupted his wife with good humoured imperiousness. "Mr. 'Screwy' Wilson has been talking to you, I can hear. He's been telling you about his wife's economy and all the rest of it, but her style wouldn't suit you, I can tell you, without you can get rid of that appetite of thine. the sort of economy that thinks a thing must be cheap if it's low-priced, that'll spoil a week's bread trying to save a ha'porth of barm, and then brag of it's going a long way because it's that heavy that hardly any one can eat it. never was my way, and I aren't going to begin it now, and what's more, I aren't going to have you beginning to screw and scrape and make yourself miserable, like a lot of those fellows as are Building Society mad."

"Now, my dear," said Joe, striking in as his wife paused for breath, and speaking in a slightly remonstrative tone, "you've got hold of the wrong pig altogether this time. Screwy, as you call him, hasn't been talking to me at all, and I

just mentioned Building Societies in a general way, without any particular notion of going into one just now. I know you'll do well with whatever money I get, and I just wish I had a quarter as much as you *could* do well with."

"Well, you know that Screwy's talking about what his wife can do, has sometimes made mischief in families," answered Mrs. Mason, in a voice that was at once coaxing and apologetical; "and the idea that he had been on with his mollicotting talk to you got me out a bit."

A slight smile on her husband's countenance made her alive to the fact that she was again beginning to get warm on the subject, and so with a slight laugh at her own impetuosity, she fell back into her usual cheery tone and went on,—"But never mind him, you know I spoke for good, and I'm sure we'll both do for the best, and a good deal may be done with the rise you'll get. But I think we had better start Fanny in a bit of a business, and see Harry out of his time, before we begin to think of getting houses."

The son and daughter had been sitting quietly at the breakfast table up to this point of the dialogue between their parents, but on hearing their names thus mentioned they both struck into the conversation, and parents and children were soon happily engaged in laying out a brilliant future for themselves. A future whose brightness was chiefly

founded on the good news—and to a family in their position of life it was great good news—which Joe had to tell that morning; and leaving the Masons to their aerial castle-building, I will proceed to give a somewhat more detailed description of the family than can be gathered from the foregoing dialogue.

One of the hardest of the universal lessons of life, is the one the teachings of which at length cause us to personally realize the sad force of the truism, that the happiness which is our being's end and aim, is unattainable—convinces us that the seeming chapter of accidents is really the manifestation of an immutable principle, antagonistic to the perfection of human felicity. No matter what may be our ideal of

That something still which Prompts the eternal sigh,

it is always beyond realization. We either fail after all our toil to reach it, or find if we succeed in grasping it, that distance has lent enchantment to the view by concealing the dark threads in its woof, which a closer inspection makes visible to us, even if our neighbours do not see them. If we look to money as a means of happiness, and have by luck or labour acquired the wealth we desired, we discover that despite worldly-wise maxims to the contrary,

everything has not its price, and that among the many things over which money has no purchasing power, are certain to be some which we think necessary to the completion of our idea of happiness. Again, if, taking a higher standard, we regard love as happiness, does it not invariably happen either that the course of true love cannot be made to run smooth, or that the obstacles to the smoothness of its current being overcome, the loved and won does not prove to be quite all that our fancy painted them?

No! from a life of all beer and skittles, up to that nearest approach to an Elysium on earth, first and passionate love, there is no perfect happiness. Beer brings its headaches and love its heart-aches; and pleasure, ease, and all other presumed embodiments of beatitude have their attendant evils.

I have ventured upon this bit of moralizing, lest at a first glance I might be considered guilty of inconsistency in speaking of, as a very happy family, one which had gone through what many in their own rank of life would have described as seas of trouble; for such a family the Masons were. Their life had been a constant struggle, if not with absolute poverty, at any rate with very limited means, and occasionally they had got the worst of the contest. Once Joe had been laid up for many weeks, and when at last the disease had been overcome and

the doctor had cheerfully said, "Now he only requires rest and nourishment," almost everything in their house that was saleable or pawnable had to be parted with to supply the necessary diet and defray the other expenses incidental to a long sickness. While on one or two subsequent occasions, when Joe had had long spells out of work, their recovered household gods had again to be deposited with the ever-accommodating but not altogether disinterested uncle from Lombardy, in order to procure the food necessary to keep body and soul together in such hard times.

Neither had they escaped those griefs which come alike to rich and poor. Two little locks of hair and their names in the fly-leaf of the family Bible, were all that was left to the parents of two of the four children that had been born to them. When these little ones died there were not wanting good people to reprove the sinful grief of the father and mother. They ought to look upon their death as a blessing, said these good people. The children had gone to a better place, and there would be so many mouths the less for them (the parents) to fill. It was flying in the face of the Lord to grieve for those he had taken away, and many other semi-religious common-. places to the same effect. But parents, even when their position is such as to make it doubtful whether they will be able to provide bread for their

children, are very unreasonable on this subject; they cannot philosophize on the matter, they can only feel; and so it was with Joe Mason and his wife, when within a few months they lost their two little boys. Joe couldn't see it in the same light as his philosophical friends, and though the most complacent of mortals in a general way, grew angry with his would-be consolers when they tried to convince him that his loss was a thing to be thankful for; while his wife, too stricken to be angry, merely wept for her children and would not be comforted. when time, the sure consoler, had taken from her grief its first worst bitterness, she still lovingly treasured the two tiny curls and spoke regretfully-wickedly the good people said-of her lost darlings, whose deaths had been the greatest grief of her married life.

Nor could Joe and his missis have laid claim to the Dunmow flitch. Occasional differences of opinion had arisen between them respecting the exact extent of the wife's dominion, and they had had difficulties on the subject of bringing up their children in the way they should go. Sometimes too, when Joe had stayed late at the club-house of his Benefit Society, and on coming home from it showed by a helter-skelter style of speech, and boisterously affectionate come-and-have-a-glass-along-o'-me sort of manner, that the bad beer had done its bad office, his wife would

administer some pretty strong verbal punishment, in the course of the process known among ladies as giving him a piece of her mind.

While the father and mother had their matrimonial breezes, their son and daughter had also their little disputes, which usually resulted in each requesting the other never to speak to them again, and mutually agreeing that that would be the best way. But "never" in these instances rarely lasted longer than a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time Fanny would be found waiting upon Harry, and coaxingly asking him not to mind what she had said, that she didn't mean it; telling him that the quarrel was all her fault (which it rarely was) and otherwise petting and making much of him; and he graciously accepting her submission, all went well again.

But though not one of those terrifically good families of whom it is said—mostly by its own members—that they have never had an unkind word with each other, the Masons were still, as I have intimated, a very happy family—happy in their mutual love, and in spirits thankfully and contentedly inclined. In times of sorrow they clung to and comforted each other. The ills of poverty they had borne, not only with an uncomplaining bravery, but even with a sort of cheery philosophy, which was summed up in Joe's saying, that it was all in a lifetime. They appreciated and were thankful for that too

often despised happiness arising from the mere absence of special trouble; and on such occasions as this, when Joe had to impart the good news of his promotion, they joyed in each other's joy.

Ridiculous as the idea would appear to goahead men of the day-to those especially who have (or say they have) "begun the world without a shilling, sir,"—the Masons were inclined to look upon themselves, not only as a very happy, but also as a very successful family. Until the opening of the Stonebury Railway, Joe Mason had been an agricultural labourer, on an estate three miles from the town, but having in some small matters shown himself very obliging to the driver who was ballasting the line where it ran through a portion of the land on which he was employed, the driver had in return, by speaking to his foreman, got Joe a job as coke-This was a great change for man on the line. the better for Joe. It at once brought his wages from ten to sixteen shillings per week, shortened his hours of labour, and saved him a walk of three miles night and morning. Better than all this, it placed him in a position where there was a reasonable prospect of advancement, and being a steady, civil, and industrious fellow, promotion had come to him in due time. From the coke stage he had got to the steam shed, from there to the footplate as fireman, and now, as we have seen, he had been made a driver,—a driver with a commencing pay of six shillings, and the certainty of a progressive and comparatively rapid rise to seven-and-sixpence a day. And being of a contented and modest disposition, it was not, after all, so very surprising that as from this position he looked back on the time when he was a farm labourer working fifteen or sixteen hours a day for ten shillings a week, he should, with a feeling of gratitude, consider himself a highly successful man.

Nor was it in his personal advance alone that he regarded himself as having succeeded in life. —he had been successful in his family. the earlier years of their married life, it had been necessary for Mrs. Mason to "buckle to." in order to eke out their at that time terribly small income. She had gone out washing or charing, and occasionally to agricultural work. This she had done cheerfully until such time as children were growing up round them; but after that it was with reluctance and regret that she still went out. She knew that a mother could not be from home all day without her children being sufferers, but she also knew that the presence of children in such a home as hers then was, made it more than ever incumbent upon her to turn in a little money. On this point her husband heartily sympathized with her. and sometimes, when talking the matter over. would say, "Well, hang it, lass, stay at home, and we'll manage somehow." But on forming themselves into a committee of ways and means, and discussing the subject in detail, they were always forced to the conclusion that bad as it was, her going out to work was the least of the several evils to which their choice was restricted, and so though often heavy at heart, as well as tired in body, she continued to go.

Joe's translation from the agricultural to the railway world had, among its other beneficial effects, obviated this painful necessity. As soon as he was fairly established as a cokeman, the missis gave up charing, and devoted herself exclusively to the care and improvement of her own household. and being a clever, healthy woman, with a natural aptitude for domestic management, she soon made her home a very comfortable one, and always kept her husband and children "right clean and tidy." For years she and Joe had severely "scrumped" themselves in order to give their children an education and a trade: believing, as parents will do, that in due time they would again find the bread they had thus cast upon the waters, and now the days of their reward seemed near at hand. Their son was just entering upon the last year of his apprenticeship in the engineering department of the Stonebury Railway, and bade fair not only to become a good and steady workman, but a more than

ordinarily clever fellow in a general way. He belonged to that rising school of artisans which has taken advantage of the abundant means of self-education within its reach. He was for his age a fair English scholar, and pretty extensively read in standard literature. endowed with a good memory and great fluency of speech, and oratorically inclined, he had studied with considerable success to acquire a bright and forcible diction. He was already a person of mark at the Stonebury Debating Union. and was much petted by its leading members, most of whom were his superiors in point of social position. In the works, where he had late taken to speak at any meetings held among the men, he was looked upon as quite a prodigy, and as it was known that he intended to join the union of his trade as soon as he was eligible for admission to the society. the unionists even now spoke of him as one certain to become prominent as a trade union leader. Joe Mason and his wife were often told that they ought to be proud of their son, and they were proud of him with a loving unselfish pride. While as to Fanny, it is no figure of speech to say she idolized her brother. there was any other young fellow so good and clever as "our Harry," was a thing not dreamt of in her philosophy.

Having only been bound 'prentice for three &

years, she was, though two years younger than her brother, already out of her time as a milliner and dressmaker, and though for the present working as a journeywoman at the not very munificent salary of seven shillings per week, looked forward to establishing a little business of her own when Harry should be out of his time. Harry must of course be considered first. an apprentice he was getting very little pay, and his parents were hardly in so good a position as were those of most of the other apprentices in the shop. To save "our Harry" from feeling anything of this had been Fanny's constant object since ever she could earn a shilling. declined to join the mutual accommodation library established among the work girls of the establishment in which she was employed, the rule of which was that each member should take in and lend round to the others one or more of the penny serials, the to-be-continued stories of which were chiefly devoted to the thrilling adventures of poor but virtuous maidens wooed by rich and noble lovers. She never attended Steperson's Select Dancing Academy, or joined in any of the other pleasures of her fellowworkers which cost money, and after coming from a hard day's labour at the shop, she would commence work again at home and continue it far into the small hours to earn extra money,and all this, not to save for herself, but in VOL. I.

order that Harry might have pocket-money. Though an innate taste and sense of neatness enabled her always to appear nicely dressed, her garments were often of the poorest material, in order that Harry's might be of the best. was naturally a joyous light-hearted girl, who could have enjoyed many of the little pleasures of which she deprived herself for her brother's sake, but her great love for that brother made the self-sacrifice pleasant to her, while she would have regarded as a slanderer any person who had suggested that there was just a possible touch of selfishness in the unhesitating matter-of-course manner in which he acquiesced in her interests being habitually sacrificed to his.

Whether they looked back or forward it was not without reason that the Masons considered themselves a happy and successful family, and never had they been so much inclined to regard themselves in that light as at the present moment, when with the news of "father's" promotion for a foundation, they sit building the aerial castle of a still brighter future.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESULT OF A PITCH-IN.

ES, they were very happy and loving to-

gether as they sat discussing the great things they could do now that "father" was a driver, and the still greater things they would be able to accomplish in the good time coming, when, in addition to their present good fortune, Harry would be out of his time and Fanny in business for herself. They were very happy in this, but happier still by reason of the fact that while they could plan for, they could not see into the future,—that while they were foreshadowing coming events after their own fashion, actual coming events threw no shadow Happier in that they were unconscious before. that this was the last happy hour they would ever spend all together—the last happy hour that any of them would know for a long time—that they were unconscious that, without any warning cloud to herald or soften the shock, their air-built castle of happiness to be, was about to be shattered by a thunderbolt.

I wonder whether there really is such a thing as a presentiment of evil? Of course there are times when, without our knowing why, we are out of sorts, and if at such a time we meet with any special misfortune, we would probably say that we felt that something was going to happen, quite forgetting how often we had experienced the same feeling when nothing did happen. Then there are people who, always prophesying evil, must hit the mark sometimes; and again, the I-told-you-so class who claim prophetic powers after an evil is irretrievably accomplished. But if, apart from indigestion, ennui, or a gloomy temperament, there exists some subtle physiological principle in the nature of a presentiment proper, its influence is probably confined to beings of a specially sensitive organization. With Joe Mason, however, good digestion waited upon appetite, and he was neither of a gloomy nor highly sensitive temperament, and so when on finishing his breakfast he went off to his work, so far from experiencing any foreboding of evil, he was in a particularly cheery humour,—and vet he had left his home to return to it no more till he was carried into it as "the body" on which a coroner's jury had sat, and returned a verdict of " Accidental Death."

Nor had Mrs. Mason any mysterious premonitions of the evil that had then happened, when some three hours later she looked in at Mrs. Johnson's, her next-door neighbour, to inform her of Joe's promotion. When, while she was still telling her news, Charley Thompson, a young Manchester fellow who lodged with Mrs. Johnson, and was, like that lady's husband, a mechanic at the railway-works, came in looking terribly pale and scared, she certainly knew that

> "So sad a messenger Some ghastly news must bring;"

but even then it did not dawn upon her that the bad news was specially for her. Both women jumped to the conclusion that Charley himself had met with some accident, and in the same breath asked—"Oh, Charley, what is it? Where are you hurt?"

"It's not me," he said, looking down, and speaking in a low, gasping tone; "we're all right at the shop," he went on, interrupting his landlady in an alarmed inquiry as to her husband's safety, and then drawing a long breath and raising his eyes in a timid, pitying way to Mrs. Mason's face, he added, "it's on the line."

Then she knew what had happened; the thunderbolt had fallen. In an instant the blood rushed to her face and throat, flushing them a deep red, and almost as quickly sank again, leaving her deathly pale, as in a sharp, shivering tone she exclaimed—"It's my Joe! He's dead!"

"Oh no, not dead," said Thompson; "there's been a pitch-in between his train and another, and as he was badly shaken they've brought him back to the infirmary here."

His attempt to speak lightly was very ineffectual, for he had seen Joe Mason as he lay in the van in which he had been brought from the scene of the collision, and knew that though not dead he was dying.

"Harry's with him," he went on, after a brief pause in which Mrs. Mason had broken down in an attempt to speak, "and he sent me for you, and I came in to ask the missis here to break it to you, and was put out a bit on coming right on you, that was all." He had kept his eye on her as he spoke, and at this point stepped hastily forward just in time to catch her as she was sinking insensible to the ground. The necessity for action roused him from his frightened manner, and he now spoke with an energy and decision of tone very different from that in which he had broken the evil tidings of which he was the bearer.

"I've got a cab at the corner; go and bring it, and give me a hand to get her in," he said to his landlady.

"Go on," he repeated, seeing that she hesitated. "Poor Joe's done for, and he knows it, and all his cry is for her. The motion will bring her round, poor thing," he said, answering the lingering look which Mrs. Johnson cast upon her prostrate friend as she went out.

"And what about little Fanny?" suddenly asked Mrs. Johnson, when a few minutes later they were in the cab.

"Oh, I called in at the shop and asked Miss French to tell her what had happened, and take her to the infirmary, so she'll be there by this time."

* * * * *

In carrying out the arrangements for the running of the additional trains some one had blundered, the result being that on coming round a sharp curve Joe Mason found his train dashing into another which he had heard approaching, but had supposed was, as it ought to have been, upon the down rails. While the exclamation "Good God, they're into us!" was yet upon his lips the thing was done, and even in that first confusing moment he knew, as Charley Thompson had said, that he was done for. He knew, as he lay in agony under his overturned engine, that he was fatally injured; and now as with the pain conquered by opiates, and the numbness of approaching death, he lay on the infirmary bed, he knew that he was dving fast. He knew it by his own feelings, by the pitying glances of the mates who had carried him there and still stood at the foot of the bed, by the stricken looks of his son and daughter, and the tone of the clergyman who

was praying with him. It was this knowledge that made him ask so earnestly every few minutes if "the old lass" had come; and now that a slight movement among those round the bed tells him that she has arrived, a slight smile flickers for a moment over his pale, death-pinched face. All stand back from the bed as she approaches it, and laying her head beside him moans, "Oh my poor Joe! my poor Joe!" Then as Joe feebly strokes her hair and mutters, "Poor old lass, I know it's hard on you," she at last finds relief in tears, and for some minutes nothing is heard but her choking sobs, and Joe's occasional "Poor lass! poor lass!"

But when she has mastered the first violence of her grief, he whispers "bring Harry," and she beckons her son to the bedside.

Then Joe, fixing his fast glazing eyes upon him, says, "IIarry lad, your mother and sister have always been very good to you and deserve well at your hands. You know that, and I've no doubt you'll do what is right; but you see how it is with me, and somehow I feel as if I could die happier if you promise me now that you will stick to them, and if needs be think of them before yourself. And, Harry my boy, you're but young and they're both very proud of you; never do anything to bring grief to them or disgrace on yourself; it'll break their hearts if you do; think of that if ever you are tempted to go wrong. Now promise me, Harry."

Harry Mason has yet to learn the lesson which time and trouble teach, and Shakspeare with such expressiveness and pathos puts into the mouth of Macduff-that while we should strive to bear our griefs like men, we must also feel them like men. He is at an age which thinks it a degradation to his manhood to be seen in tears, and so when at this point his father sinks back exhausted, he takes him gently by the hand, and, his utterance being choked with grief, merely whispers "I promise." Then with his disengaged arm he draws his mother to him and kisses her—kisses her for the first time since he had been Next he kisses Fanny, who has crept to a child. the bedside again, and then they kiss their father's cold lips-lips which shall speak never again in this world, and vainly strive to utter the thanks the expression of which can nevertheless be seen in the faint love light that for a moment gleams in his fast glazing eye.

It is their farewell kiss, and having imprinted it they silently fall back a little, amid their own grief instinctively recognising the heavier sorrow of the wife who, some half hour later, they lead away a wife no longer, but a stricken widow.

CHAPTER III.

PULLING THROUGH.

O physical evils the poor have often to succumb. However brave and willing they may be in spirit, flesh is weak, and accident or disease may at any time prostrate them in their struggle to live. When overtaken by the bodily ills to which flesh is heir, they must perforce give way, but they cannot afford to yield to grief. There is no more pathetic passage in the "Song of the Shirt" than that in which the sempstress exclaims—

"A little weeping would ease my heart, But in their briny bed My tears must stop, for every drop Hinders needle and thread;"

and the principle embodied in the lines is generally applicable to the poor. To them grief is literally a luxury, for an indulgence in it would hinder work, and it must therefore be battled down. This is especially the case when the grief arises from the death of a family breadwinner, and so, even during the first bitterness

of her sorrow, Mrs. Mason had to bestir herself. There was their means and mode of living in the future to be considered, and in the meantime the funeral to attend to.

Joe had been a favourite both with his mates and the brethren of his Benefit Society, and as a mark of respect to his memory they determined to attend his funeral, which was to take place on the Sunday following his death. When they sent to acquaint the widow with their intention and ask whether she approved of it, she sat down and for a few minutes indulged in a good cry. Then drving her tears she told the messenger that she would like them to come, and was very much obliged to them for thinking so well of her Joe, whom she knew had liked them The officers of the society undertook the processional arrangements, but there was still a deal for Mrs. Mason to do, and conquering her grief, she did it. The volunteer mourners, to the number of two hundred, came on the Sunday, the officials of the lodge of which Joe had been a member, bearing the funeral paraphernalia of their order, and all of them clad in the customary suit of solemn black which working men usually adopt as their best clothes, not as many people suppose, from any special predilection for sombre colours, but from motives of utility-on the ground that a suit of black always looks respectable and comes in handy for

such occasions as christenings and funerals. the cemetery they formed round the grave in a dark ring, which was broken here and there by the lighter dress of a stray fireman or driver, who, being down for duty on that day, had not been able to attend the funeral in a regular way, but had managed to slip down to the cemetery for a short time. Conspicuous among these was Jem Gregson, the burly driver whose mate Joe had He had brought his train in some half hour before, and now, with his jolly face black and greasy from his work and curiously distorted by his efforts to hide his emotion, presented a spectacle that on any less solemn occasion would have been laughable. When the coffin was lowered into the grave he fairly broke down, and sobbed like a child as he threw a handful of soil on the coffin and exclaimed, "Good-bye, Joe, old Then, rubbing his face with a bit of greasy waste, and thereby making it look more dirty than ever, he turned to those near him and said, "'Scuse me, chaps; we were mates for years:" to which the chaps replied, "Never mind, Gregson, old fellow, it's no shame to you; he was a good mate,"—and Gregson, with difficulty choking another sob, adds, "Av! that he was, as good and true a mate as ever stepped on a footplate."

Nor did the sympathy of Joe Mason's shopmates terminate with seeing him laid in his

In his day, and so far as his means would allow, Joe's hand had ever been open as the day to melting charity. No subscription to aid a mate in sickness or sorrow had gone without his name, and he had ever been a cheerful giver. In his lifetime he had done good, and the memory of it had not been buried with his bones. His shopmates remembered it. When speaking of his sudden death, they would remind each other that he had been a good sort, and on one of them suggesting that something ought to be done for his family now they were in trouble, it was at once agreed that a "sub" should be made on their behalf. Jem Gregson was appointed to conduct it in the running department, while Sandy Grant, the leading hand under whom Harry Mason was learning his trade, volunteered, much to the surprise of his shopmates, to carry it out in the engineering department. Sandy was a middle-aged, hardfisted Scotch bachelor, whose name rarely appeared on subscription lists. Nor was he content with merely not giving, for when, in accordance with the law of workshop etiquette which directs that the collector of a charitable subscription shall ask every one on the establishment to give, he was solicited to subscribe, he would when declining read them a severe lecture on the reprehensible improvidence of men who did not provide as fully as they might do for adverse

contingencies. He was a member of a variety of Trade and Benefit Societies, and argued that it was unfair to ask him to contribute to the relief of men who neglected to avail themselves of the provisions afforded by such societies. For an harangue of this kind accompanied by a donation, collectors would not have cared, but in a general way they would have resented a lecture coupled with a refusal. In Sandy's case, however, such lectures were taken in good part, because his shopmates had come to know that in these matters he really acted on principle. and that on the special occasions on which he did give, he contributed with a liberality which in a great measure atoned for his numerous That he would ever have undertaken the office of collector was, however, a thing that had never entered into the imagination of any one who knew him. But Sandy, who considered that the circumstances justified the subscription in the present instance, and looked upon Harry almost as his own son, thought it a matter of duty to exert himself on behalf of the family, and where duty was concerned he never hesitated about going out of his usual way. So, having himself headed the subscription list he took it through the shops. Twenty pounds were collected among the workmen, to which the company added another ten, and Gregson was deputed to hand over the amount to the widow,

which he did with words of kindness for the memory of her dead husband, which she valued more even than the money.

But while in their time of trouble the Masons found many friends, they having in their little way been successful, of course also had ill wishers, and they were destined to have sore proof that misfortunes never come singly. death of the head of a working-class household. -especially when it is a sudden death, usually leads to the dispersion of that household and a sinking in caste of its members. Sometimes they get scattered among relations and fall into the position of dependents,—a position often little less bitter among the poor than among the rich. Or the widow has to take in lodgers for a living; or set up a mangle, or turn charwoman, and become a servant among people with whom she has been an equal, and whose ostentatious pitv even if well meant is scarcely less hard to bear than open scorn or insult. Something of this sort it was prophesied and hoped by some would now be the fate of the Masons. Old Job Coshly and his slatternly dram-drinking wife, went about saying with unconcealed satisfaction that "this would bring them to their cake and milk, dang their proud stomachs." For Job had been Joe Mason's mate in the days when he was a farm labourer, and had never forgiven him for getting on in

the world; while he and his wife had cordially hated Mrs. Mason ever since the time when she had given them a particularly strong piece of her mind on their coming to her house in a state of intoxication, to ask her husband to testify his friendship by accompanying them to the Jolly Waggoner and standing a pot or two.

Mrs. Tightwaist and the Misses Tightwaist, who occupied a villa overlooking the row of cottages in which the Masons lived, and from the position of a tradesman's wife and daughters looked down upon them, opined that now pride They had been severely agwould have a fall. grieved by the fact that Fanny Mason's pretty face and figure, and tastily chosen dress, enabled her to make an appearance infinitely more attractive than, with all their extravagance, was ever attained by the Tightwaist ladies, whose natural deficiencies in the matter of physical beauty were, owing to a still greater deficiency in natural taste, aggravated rather than concealed or softened by dress. Ever since the time when young Rawbones-who, Mrs. Tightwaist gave it out, ought to have married her youngest daughter but didn't,—had with ill-concealed interest asked them who was the pretty little girl over the way. they had been given to wonder how that "brassy little creature" could dress as she did, and hoping (in a Christian spirit, of course) that no harm would come of it; and it was perhaps in this spirit, and looking solely at the chastening effects of adversity, that at this time of trouble they gleefully expressed their conviction that pride in the shape of a more presentable appearance than their own would have a fall.

But Mrs. Mason was among those who did not believe in this peculiar kind of Christianity. Among the female friends who, with a well-intentioned purpose of "cheering the poor soul," dropped in to see her, or insisted upon her coming to have a cup of tea with them, were some indiscreet enough to repeat these sort of things to her, and being after her fashion a proud woman, they She did not say much, but she restung her. solved within herself that she would make a fight for it before she would go down in the She would show them, she said to social scale. herself, that she would hold her head as high as ever, and without becoming a burden upon her children either. Giving up her idea of merely using the money she had as a means of bridging over the interval until Harry should be out of his time, and a sufficient income be once more secured to the household, she determined to start a little shop, and set about carrying out her intention with a nervous energy that had characterized her movements since her husband's death. With the consent of her landlord she had a little shop window, a counter and other fixtures, put in the parlour of her house, and then laid in a

stock of general provisions.—that being the line of trade she had chosen. But the shop had not been got fairly under way when at last her health gave way under the struggle to suppress her grief. She was laid up with a nervous fever, and Fanny had to leave her place to nurse When at the end of two months she was able to get about again, she found the embryo business had collapsed, and making the best of a bad job, sold the stock and fixtures at "an alarming sacrifice." Worse than this, she found Fanny thoroughly worn out and suffering from a dangerous weakness of sight, brought on by her having while at home sewn for many hours by candlelight when watching by the sick bed. short, Fanny in her turn required nursing, and though a fortnight of rest and quiet restored her general health and strength, she had for many weeks longer to go about with a shade over her eyes.

During this time the Masons experienced the benefits of that practical sympathy which the poor show to their friends in times of sorrow. Mrs. Johnson came, quite as a matter of course, to assist in the nursing and house work, and when Fanny showed some little hesitation about accepting similar assistance from Mrs. Gregson, that good lady, fixing an astonished glance upon her, replied to her remonstrance—"Too much trouble indeed! La bless the girl, if we poor folks

didn't help each other, what would become of You go and see after your mother while I tidy up the kitchen, and then look me out Harry's dirty things, so that I may take them home and wash 'em along with my master's." In much the same way Charley Thompson put down her objections to his taking Harry to share his lodgings while her mother was laid up. During the weary weeks too, when from the state of her eyes she was unable either to work or read. Charley would often drop in of an evening with his concertina, or the day's newspaper, or some book, and would play, or read, or chat, with a view to cheer her. It was with a like intention that Miss French, the forewoman under whom she had learned her trade, would occasionally call in to see her, and when on her eyes getting better, it was decided that she should start business on her own account, Miss French was very kind in getting her work. She obtained for her the custom of a number of ladies who, though having their principal work done at the fashionable establishment which she served, practised sundry economies in the way of repairs and alterations, of which a fashionable establishment would have scorned to take cognizance. though in her heart of hearts, Fanny would give all the credit of the transaction to Charley Thompson, it was more to Miss French's kind thoughtfulness than to Charley's impulsive generosity,

that she owed the gift of the sewing-machine, which made her business a profitable and comfortable one, and to her had also a secret sentimental value, far beyond its material one.

When they happened to be at Mason's together Charley would escort Miss French home, and on one of these occasions, after Fanny had commenced business, she said to him, "Charley, if little Fan is to make anything like a comfortable living she must have a sewing-machine; they've so cheapened work that there's no getting a living by hand labour alone."

"Ah, but they cost a lot of money," replied Charley, shaking his head in a rather helpless manner, "and what with the sickness they've had, and what they lost by the shop, they've none of that to spare."

"Oh, I know how things are with them," she answered, "and I wouldn't have mentioned this only I've a scheme of my own, if you think it'll do;" and, without waiting to be questioned, she went on to disclose her plan.

She knew, she explained, an impulsive, penny-wise-and-pound-foolish sort of a lady, afflicted, among her other weaknesses, with an infatuated belief that she was in an eminent degree the two things which more than all others she was not—to wit, the strong-minded woman of the age, and an economical domestic manager. This lady had bought a first-class sewing-machine in a great

hurry, threatening to achieve astonishing effects with it in the way of cutting down her household expenses, but as a matter of fact she had only injured her fingers, spoilt her materials, and broken the machine, which she would now probably sell for a pound or two, especially as, having been reading "The Garden that Kept the Table," she had found a new hobby in kitchen gardening.

She (Miss French) thought that Charley could repair the machine, and if he could and would, she would lend either him or Fanny the money to buy it.

"Well, Miss French, you are a stunner," exclaimed Charley, led by his enthusiasm to be more emphatic than choice in the expression of his admiration, "but, hang it, you know I'll buy the machine; Fan has given me no end of neckties and things of that kind, while I've never made her a present yet, and now'll be the chance, don't you see?"

She did see, and so Charley bought the machine, and having, in the course of a week or two, repaired, polished, and painted it, making it look and work in every respect "as good as new," he one evening packed it in a box and took it over to Mrs. Mason's.

"Law, Charley, what ever have you got there?" exclaimed Fanny, who was in the house by herself when he walked in with the box on his shoulder.

- "A milliner and dressmaker," replied Charley, as he put down the box, "a first-class hand that I want you to take on as mate."
- "Get off with your nonsense," she said, not catching his meaning.
- "There's no nonsense about it," said Charley, taking off the lid; "look here!"
- "Why, it's a sewing-machine," cried Fanny, looking into the box.
- "Of course it is, and what better mate than that could you have?"
 - "Is it for me, though, Charley?"
 - "Well, it's for no one else, I tell you."
 - "But who is it from?"
- "Well, as far as that goes," answered Charley, "I suppose it's from me, but it's through Miss French."

Then he told her all about the affair, and before he had finished she began to cry, a proceeding which led Charley to observe, in a slightly reproachful tone—"Well, Fan, I didn't think you'd have been that way about taking a bit of a present from me."

To which, looking up at him and smiling through her tears, she replied—"Oh, don't think it's that, Charley. It's because I'm so pleased."

While she was yet speaking Charley had got her in his arms, and was kissing her and murmuring—"Well, never mind, Fan, you're a good little girl." For some few seconds of silent happiness she let her head lie on his breast, and then, looking coyly up, said—"But you know, Charley, I must pay you for the machine when I am able."

"Very well then," said Charley, "I'll take it out in neckties—you can make me one whenever you get a nice bit of cabbage."

At this they both laughed, and then, after kissing her again, he let her go, feeling, as in her quiet way she put it to herself, so happy; while Charley, as he gazed on her bright flushed face, thought in his more impulsive way, and with a sort of combative emphasis, as though some one had been disputing the proposition, "and she's as pretty as she's good, too."

At one time it had really seemed as if the wishes of the Coshly and Tightwaist sort of people must have been gratified. consequence of her unfortunate speculation in the shop, and the expenses of sickness, she found her money gone and Fanny unable to work, Mrs. Mason made up her mind that she must, as she expressed it, "knuckle down," unless things speedily took a turn for the better. happily, the turn in their long lane of trouble came in the nick of time. Fanny's business proved a success, and by the time it was fairly established, and bringing in what, with economical management, was a living for her mother and herself, the event to which they had all looked forward so long and hopefully was at hand. A year had elapsed since the fatal pitch-in, and in another week Harry would be out of his time, and then—and then Mrs. Mason and Fanny fell to building castles again—castles over which once more hovered destruction, not this time in so sharp and terrible a shape as that in which at one blow it shattered those they built on the bright summer morning twelve months agone, but in the, presently, less startling, though in its ultimate consequences, perhaps more disastrous form, of a pretty girl and a self-willed love.

BOOK I.

Falling in Love.

CHAPTER I.

STONEBURY.

F Stonebury was only half the important place in the estimation of the rest of the world which it is in that of its immediate

inhabitants and of the people of Stoneyshire generally, the mere mention of the name would be sufficient for descriptive purposes. As a matter of fact, however, and native belief notwithstanding, there is every reason to suppose that the town in question is scarcely known to the outer world save by name. Its recognition even to this extent is chiefly due to its association with the historical events of some three centuries back, at which time it was in a certain degree really the place of mark that by its inhabitants it is still thought to be. But its greatness has departed. The course of events being against its

maintenance, until these later times in which the place has sunk into the insignificance of the smaller provincial towns not generally known; though the native dwellers therein, having by a process of stultification brought themselves to confound the traditions of a past with a still existing greatness, will not acknowledge this. Nevertheless, such is the case, and as our story is of the present day, and its scenes are laid chiefly in Stonebury, it is necessary to give some account of that town and its people as they now are.

An incident in which Stonebury had been concerned in the historic times above referred to had led to its natives being styled "The Proud . Stoneburyites," and to this distinction they have fondly clung in all succeeding generations, adopting it in a self-satisfied spirit as a sort of county slogan. Candidates for parliament and others who want to get on the right side of them addressed them as Proud Stoneburyites. are much given to referring to themselves as We Proud Stoneburyites, and from the constant practice of this self-flattery they have become intensely clannish, looking upon any stray strangers who may come to reside within their gate, not merely as inferior beings, but also as objectionable intruders.

The Proud Stoneburyites of course try according to their lights to "act as sich," and

their lights leading them in a let-us-be-genteelor-die direction, have so intensified the ordinary county-town proneness to gentility, as to fully account for their pluming themselves on their town and them being nothing if not genteel. There are people—from other towns of course who are unkind enough to say that Stonebury is behind the age, to point to the fact that it is badly paved and undrained, and is in the habit of resisting as innovations unworthy of a good old town. modern improvements of the demonstrated benefits of which other places thankfully avail themselves. These carping critics are wont to dwell upon the circumstance of the town having gained an unenviable reputation in connexion with corrupt electoral practices, and make scornful allusion to the fact, that those who have the management of its local affairs are given to petty bickerings and jobbery, and are to a great extent under the sway of a gentleman notorious throughout England as an electioneering man in the For such talk as this, however, the men moon. of Stonebury care very little; these matters they consider do not interfere with their gentility, which they look upon as being emphatically a thing "which nobody can deny." is true that the captious aliens just spoken of attack even the gentility of the natives, summing up their characteristics by saying that they would-sell their stockings to buy gloves.

they (the aliens) viciously go to the extreme of sneering at the native slogan, expressing an opinion—in which most people out of Stoneyshire would agree were the circumstances of the case put before them for judgment—that the matter which had given rise to it was, after all, a petty sell-your-stockings-to-buy-gloves kind of an affair. But this, though said with a disparaging intention, is received as a compliment by the Stoneburyites, who now put forth the selling-your-stockings-to-buy-gloves simile as a flattering and specially apt illustration of that combination of poverty and pride which is the essence of the let-us-be-genteel-or-die spirit.

Gentility of this type is generally confined to the lower middle class, and people who "have seen better days," but in Stonebury it is allpervading, so far at least as the natives are concerned, and they form the vast majority of the inhabitants. Of the working classes, as they are generally understood, there are comparatively few in the town, and those are mostly imbued with the prevailing spirit, while the clerks, countermen, and young ladies attached to the shops, and "genteel occupations" which make up the chief business of the place; are, as well as their masters and mistresses, clothed with gentility as with a garment.

For its size, or lest that should be a bull, we will say for a town of 25,000 inhabitants, Stone-

bury is a large place, extending over fully as much ground as many towns with three or four times its population. The town proper is small enough certainly, consisting of three short main streets, and a number of narrow, dark, dirty alleys branching off from them. But meandering away from the main streets for a considerable distance. until they gradually taper off into the open country, are a number of straggling suburbs which come within the limits of Stonebury in its capacity of a parliamentary borough. go-ahead place these outlying districts would in course of time have had, so to speak, to dress up. gradually taking close order to such a degree as to become indistinguishably fused into the town proper, but Stonebury not being a go-ahead place. they remain the distinct suburbs they have always been, and maintain the open order characteristic of the earlier stages of suburbanization. this state of things gives some little justification to those who say that the place is slow, it more than compensates for that by the admirable manner in which it is suited to the special wants of the native inhabitants.

By their names, the two largest of the suburbs serve to indicate the character of, and traditionally perpetuate the greatness of, the town, and they also afford a means for that isolation of classes so dear to the soul of gentility. The adjoining districts of Castle Bridge and Moat Fields

are so named from commencing in the immediate neighbourhood of Stonebury Castle, which figured not ingloriously in the olden times, and still frowns commandingly over town and river. This district forms the poor, or as the natives have it, low, part of the town. In it is situated the small thread factory which represents the manufacturing interests of the town, and it is inhabited chiefly by the factory hands, the poorer classes of labourers, and a number of Irish families engaged in the rag and bone and hawking businesses.

Right away from Castle Bridge, on another side of the town, is Abbotsgate, built upon ground that once formed part of the property with which the monkish earl who founded it had endowed Stonebury Abbey, of which a single tower with its nave and side aisles—just sufficient to serve as a parish church -is all that has survived the effects of decay's effacing finger, and the barbarous work of the Vandals let loose upon ecclesiastical buildings at the time of the suppression of the monasteries. Though the days have long since passed away in which Stonebury Abbey ranked high among the religious houses of the kingdom, and its abbot had a seat in parliament and the authority of a bishop within his house, something of the old monastic air still hangs about the neighbourhood. It is a quiet, shady, roomy, cathedralclose sort of a district, and in it the highest order of Stonebury gentility—the half-pay officer, semi-detached villa type of the thing—reigns supreme. Here reside the retired tradesmen and others who live upon their means. Here are the private dwellings of the professional men of the town, the manager and chief clerks of the county bank, and the few government officials necessary for conducting the public business of the district. And here lastly, though certainly not leastly, for they are the acknowledged magnates of the locality, also live sundry "connexions" of the county families.

Running at right angles from the town end of Abbotsgate, is the minor suburb of Fairview, in which the second-rate gentility of Stonebury have elected to take up their abode. Stonebury Railway Company has established its wharves, warehouses, and workshops in part of this district, much to the disgust of its inhabitants, who strongly object to such vulgar things coming between the wind and their gentility; though as the wharves are walled in from the road, and the workshops stand well back from it, this grievance is not so bad as it might have Though spoken of as a township, Fairview really consists of a single road of about half a mile in length. One side of it is occupied by a number of showy villas, which are chiefly tenanted by tradesmen who, though not

a position to retire from business, are sufficiently well to do to keep a private house apart from the shop, railway officials, and the proprietors of boarding-schools. On the other side are several small, but of course genteel, rows of cottages, in which dwell the clerks. married shopmen, and working-class gentility of the town generally, as well as a number of the mechanics from the railway works just But these latter, though in the spoken of: district, are not of it. Their trade cannot by any construction of the term be brought under the head of a genteel occupation, even if they wished it, which they do not. They have mostly come from the larger busier towns in which the mechanical industries are carried on, and finding themselves regarded as intruders, they returned the compliment by calling the town a slow old hole, making observations of anything but a flattering character upon the gentility of its inhabitants, and boastfully pointing to the superiority of their own rate of pay over that of most of those employed in the genteel occupations of the town, as a means of giving point to their ridicule of what they consider to be the contemptible feeling which induces the stay-at-home Stoneburyites to say, that they would rather be hanged in Stonebury than die a natural death elsewhere.

As the chief market-town of the shire—the

town to which the county families, and the farmers and country people for many miles around, came to make their chief purchases-Stonebury proper displays a number and style of shops that would be greatly out of proportion to the number of its immediate inhabitants. is one of the few things in which it is not behind the age, few of the smaller provincial towns making so fine a show in this respect. The chief establishments are of course situated in the inevitable High Street, and first among these is Bentley's, the fashionable draper and milliner, who, as his ornamental trade sign intimates, is also of Regent Street, London. There are larger shops than Bentley's in the town, and showier, more plate-glassy ones. In these respects it is greatly surpassed by the Marte Universelle of the energetic enterprising Jew, who has added shop after shop to the little premises in which, ten years ago he started business, until now he has quite a monster establishment, in which, to dazzled country visitors, there appears to be literally "no end" of plate-glass and mirror; and outside of which there is an extent of emblematical sign sufficient to form an ordinary stock in trade. The silversmith, too, who manages to place the whole of his tolerably extensive stock of plate in his windows, also surpasses Bentley's as a show shop, while there are two at least in its own line that beat it in

the matter of glass, gilding, and window-dressing. But then we know that a wealthy nobleman, or a well-known millionaire, can better afford than poorer men to dispense with mere finery in outward appearances, and something like this is the case of Bentlev's among the shops of Stonebury. It is the oldest established shop of its kind in the town, and in a quiet substantial way has kept pace with the times. It is emphatically the shop of the county families, a row of whose coroneted carriages are often to be seen drawn up in front of it, and this fact of course leads to its being largely patronized by the smaller county gentry and the gentility of Abbotsgate. windows are not quite so gaudily dressed as those of some of its rivals, neither are they disfigured half the year round by being plastered over with "selling off," or "alarming sacrifice" Those who profess to understand such matters, will tell vou that Bentlev has often a single article in stock worth all the windowdisplay of rival establishments, while his goods generally are of the first degree of excellence.

Had its fame however rested upon its merely material advantages, Bentley's would have had no special interest beyond those circles which in addition to being genteel were also comparatively rich. It was—speaking with no irreverence—by reason of its live rather than its trade stock that "Bentley's" had come to be as familiar as house-

hold words in the mouths of Stoneburvites generally. Bentley's shopmen were a speciality. They were not an ordinary kind of countermen, to be picked up by mere money. They were Taken into the shop as boys, and only selected as apprentices after a twelve months' trial as probationers, they underwent a five years' training in the Bentlev shops, and if at the end of that time they were found to have attained to the Bentley standard of perfection, were retained on the establishment. dress suits, with a smooth, gliding style of moving about, and a soft, silently deferential manner, strikingly in contrast with that obtrusive civility consisting of an excess of Ma'aming which characterizes the ordinary what-else-can-I-serve-youwith sort of countermen, these young men had all the appearance of gentlemen ushers, and few ushers, indeed it might be said few princes, could have attended a lady to her carriage with as courtly a grace as theirs. Out of the shop they were equally grand, though in a different style. After business hours they put away the professional solemnity, and came out as gay dashing "young England" bloods. They dressed at the "swell comics" of the music-halls, were great in "Thoroughbred" coats, and "Pal-o'-mine" vests, and sported "Champagne Charley" hats, and "Burgundy Ben" scarves. In the evenings they lorded it in the smoke-room of one of the hotels of the town, where for an hour or two they drank little and cheaply, and talked much and braggingly, subsequently going home together five or six abreast singing "The Rollicking Rams," or "We Six Magnificent Bricks," and pleasingly impressed with the idea that throughout they had been doing the aristocratic sort of thing. But it was only on Sundays that they arrayed themselves in all their glory. The shininess of their hats, the gorgeousness of their scarves, the brilliancy and size of their mosaic jewellery, the fit of their gloves, the mountings of their canes, and the style in which they carried them, the connoisseurlike air with which they smoked their cheap cigars, the superb manner in which they saluted each other or a lady acquaintance, the style in which they exclaimed "By Jove!" or "'Pon honour!" when others were passing them, the would-be nonchalant air with which they lounged about the town, and the equally would-be "we'requite-used-to-it" manner in which they disported themselves in the hired traps in which they sometimes took an afternoon's drive into the country-each and all of these were on Sundays things to wonder at, and made up a total of gentility of which—these superfine shopmen being native produce-Stonebury was proud.

But great as Bentley's shopmen undoubtedly were, even they sank into comparative insignificance compared with the girls employed in the

dressmaking and millinery departments of the Bentley's young ladies, as they establishment. called themselves, and were usually called when spoken to. Bentlev's needle-drivers, as they were less genteelly styled when spoken of, had attained to all the importance of an institution in Stone-It was chiefly in connexion with them, that Bentlev's had come to be a household word in the town, and it is in connexion with them and more especially with one of their number so pre-eminent among them as to be popularly known as the Queen of the Needle-drivers, that it has been necessary to make special mention of that fashionable provincial establishment in these But as will presently be seen, Bentley's are not at all the kind of young ladies to be introduced at the fag end of a chapter, and so we will give them a new one to themselves.

CHAPTER II.

BENTLEY'S NEEDLE-DRIVERS.



ROM greed of gain, the exigencies of trade competition, and the force of habit, it has become but too general a thing to

regard milliners' hands in that Fee-Fo-Fum-ish light which in a "hand" sees a hand and nothing Sees no distinction of age or sex, sees alike in the stalwart navvy and the sickly needlegirl, simply a living machine; a creature whose bones are to be ground to make the bread, and if possible the fortune also, of those for whom it But though this is unfortunately—and perhaps to some extent necessarily—the rule, there are happily many exceptions to it. millinery, as in other trades, there are kind and considerate employers, and such an one was Bentley of Stonebury. He paid the best wages in the trade, and had comfortable workrooms. In the busy season, it was only when there was no longer room for additional hands, that he expected those who were engaged to work the least beyond the stipulated hours, and to make up for

this he never objected to their occasionally leaving off a little before the usual time, when the state of the work admitted of their doing so. When the slack season came round he was never in a violent hurry in discharging the extra hands, while at the dullest time he would find stock work in order to give regular employment to his staff hands—Bentley's needle-drivers proper, who haughtily repudiated the claim to be recognised by that title, which some of the more ambitious of the extras—who were but as supers to leading actors—set up on the strength of their occasional engagement by the house.

The millinery and dressmaking is probably the hardest and worst paid of all callings which come under the denomination of genteel occupations, yet for no other reason than that it does come under that denomination, there are thousands of young girls who deliberately prefer all its worst hardships to the material comforts which they could command in occupations which, unhappily alike for employers and employed, have had the term menial—in its degrading sense -attached to them. This is the spirit of the age and of its milliner girls. The least favourably situated of the class will still contrive to be genteel and dressy, and it may easily be imagined that Bentley's girls, natives of a supremely genteel town, well paid, and in regular employment, were great in these respects.

A favourite idea with many of the too-cleverby-half sort of people, is that low birth, like murder, will out under any circumstances. Such people will tell you that they would instantly recognise a Lady Clara Vere de Vere though she stood before them a beggar-maid, or a beggar-maid were she crowned the consort of a Cophetua, and adhering to their theory they would assert as an axiom that it was impossible for even the most advantageously circumstanced of dressmaker girls to be anything more than tawdry, easily-detected imitations of their social But it is not in this qualified and superiors. for general purposes untenable sense that I wish my description of Bentley's needle-drivers to be understood. Though in great matters, in the manner in which the graver chances and changes of life are met and borne, the distinction of caste may be apparent, it is only in extreme cases that breed and blood palpably overcome the equalizing power of appearances, and so far as mere appearances went, Bentlev's girls would have held their own in comparison with the girls of any other rank of life. half-a-dozen of them have been mingled with an equal number of the daughters of the nobility, it would have been very long odds against any believer in the theory spoken of being able to separate them by any difference of outward appearances. Nor would the Bentlev girls have

necessarily destroyed the illusion by opening their mouths; for though a sustained conversation would have betraved their deficiency in those educational accomplishments possessed by richer girls, as well as the want of sense common to them all, they could put in a listless "really" or "indeed" as effectively, or speak of any person or thing being "awfully jolly," with as great an assumption of childish enthusiasm as their wealthier compeers. So far as they could be, and much farther than it was good for them to be, they were girls of the period. Handsome, showy girls. Girls to hold men by their senses. and mould them to their will. Fast, frivolous. and fashionable, and though having in their composition little or nothing of the reality of the vices, the outward semblances of which their folly sometimes induced them to ape; yet calculated to work all the evil that it is given to pretty faces, thoughtless minds, and extravagant ideas to do. Without any express rule upon the point, it had come to be tacitly understood that no girl was to be taken on at Bentley's who was not, to say the very least of it, presentable. a body, they could fairly be described as ladylike, while some of them were that and something more, and they were one and all great in the art of dress, being in this respect by no means a bad advertisement for their employer. In the way of business they had

early knowledge of the fluctuations of fashion, and they were generally the first in Stonebury to adopt its more decided changes. Crinolines. and the clinging dress to which it at last gave way, dresses which swept the ground, and dresses which without any looping up displayed their shapely white-hosed ankles, short jackets and long cloaks, heavily trimmed hats, and bonnets consisting of hand-breadths of gauze and flowers, the most opposite of fashions each in their turn seemed to be the ones best suited to the pretty needle-drivers; and the right graceful style in which they bore them all, brought many an order to their shop. though, when on Sunday they took their afternoon walks along the Abbotsgate road, the female gentility of that quarter, knowing that the promenaders were Bentley's much talked-about needle-drivers, spoke sneeringly of the affectation of "those creatures," they were often fain to take pattern by their dress, and many of them would have given their ears to look half as pretty in it as those creatures did.

In their way, Bentley's young ladies were perhaps less of a speciality than the young men of the establishment, but then their way, as will be easily understood, had a much more extended bearing than it was possible for that of the menmilliners to have. The shopmen were well enough known by sight, but their doings had no

particular interest for any one outside their own But the doings of the needle-drivers were town talk, "everybody" taking an interest in them. All classes of young men in the town, and some who were not young, were inclined to look upon them as angelic, and from love, vanity, or a spirit of rivalry, went after them, a circumstance which, taken in conjunction with their aggravating prettiness and pertness, sufficiently accounted for the ladies taking a view of them directly opposed to the angelic one. mothers and sisters of their admirers asserted that they (the needle-drivers) were the ones to make a rich man poor and keep a poor one in Those who were in any way their his name. rivals would ask with a sniff of contempt-" What are they, we should like to know?" and if, not disconcerted by some faithful and out-spoken knight putting in-" Well, they're jolly nice girls any way," they would answer themselves with the incontrovertible but happily also little damaging truisms, that they were not everybody, and were no better than they should be. even those who had no personal motive for speaking hardly of them, or viewing them in any evil light, were on general grounds disposed to regard them as dangerous syrens—as near approaches to beautiful fiends, as it was possible for any beings out of sensation novels to be.

Even Abbotsgate gentility was constrained to

confess an interest in their proceedings, and not without reason, for one of the most memorable incidents in the modern annals of that genteel When a suburb was connected with them. certain Frank Currie, a connexion of the Curries of Stonevshire, who in his youth had gone to India a poor Cornet, returned to his native country a rich old Colonel, and took up his quarters in one of the most aristocratic villas of Abbotsgate, the gentility of that quarter made a dead matri-Had any of the daughters monial set at him. of the place landed the big fish, those who had angled in vain would, with their backers, have bitterly hated their successful rival. case however there would have still been some little balm in Gilead, the triumph would have pertained to the district, and would have been a genteel one even according to their own standard of gentility. But when it became known that the Colonel had taken to London and there married Lottie Price, one of the handsomest of the then reigning set of Bentley's needle-drivers, the spiteful rage of the Abbotsgate fishers of men knew no bounds. They would in time have forgiven the Colonel for having slipped through their own nets, but for allowing himself to be taken in that of a common needle-girl they could They had known that he had been paying attentions to this girl, but then they had charitably supposed that he had been amusing himself with her, or at the most—though they were of course much too genteel to express such an opinion in plain language—trying to seduce her, but that he would marry her was a degree of depravity of which they had never suspected him. Here the defeat was general and complete, without anything to soften, and much to embitter it, and so the yellow old Colonel and his blooming young wife—but especially the wife—were accurst of Abbotsgate.

From the time of the Currie marriage the female inhabitants of Abbotsgate had been emphatically down on Bentley's needle-drivers, whom they generally spoke of as ignorant, brazen, shameless, or some other undesirable kind of creature. And they held it as an article of belief that these creatures were dangerous to, and entertained designs upon, certain of the male youth of Abbotsgate. But this belief was opposed to the facts of the case, the designing, so far as there was any, being upon the part of the youths and against the maidens. These young gentlemen were of that high-spirited class who object to all save the lightest and most genteel employments, and must have even those thrust upon them; but do not object to live in idleness upon their relatives, while affecting to believe that they are waiting for appointments which turn up. When they had a little money they haunted the local billiard rooms,

playing long games for small stakes, and when they were unable to do this, they assumed a reckless air and loafed about the town, a sort of well-They were amongst those who dressed roughs. "went after" the needle-drivers, and as is the noble manner of their kind, they professed among themselves that they did so solely with the purpose which the virtuous ladies of Abbotsgate had in their innocence attributed to Colonel Currie when they had first heard that he was going after Lottie Price. This however was for the most part merely base boasting upon their part, their pursuit of the needle-drivers being dictated simply by a desire to gratify their vanity in being seen knocking about the town with a pretty girl on their arm. But the young bloods of this stamp are fortunately very easily read, and foolish and thoughtless as they were, Bentley's girls had yet discernment enough to understand the motives of these particular followers. Being much too vain to allow themselves to be knowingly made instrumental to the vanity of · others, the loafing young gentlemen of Abbotsgate fared but badly at their hands, and the female relatives of those high-spirited vouths need not have been under any alarm on their account.

Bentley's needle-drivers were in a general way above the weakness of keeping company. Now and again, some one of them would have her "regular young gentleman," but as a rule they flirted in sets, with sets sometimes favouring this or that set or member of a set. In this way they managed to get talked about and to keep a goodly number and variety of admirers in their train, a consummation in their opinion devoutly to be wished,—one which they held more than compensated for the fact, that such a mode of proceeding gave rise to a good deal of the less tragic kind of heartburnings and jealousies both among themselves and others.

CHAPTER III.

QUEEN KATE.

HE bulk of the admirers of the needledrivers were shopmen or clerks in the town, but of late a new (and to their rivals) formidable set had arisen in the shape of a few of the more dashingly inclined single young fellows from the railway works, who, though following black, greasy, mechanical trades, were, after working hours, as the natives were disgusted to find, able to dress and do the genteel with the best of them. At the head of this set was Charley Thompson, who had made the acquaintance of the needle-drivers while doing what he called "the big brother business" for Fanny Mason, who was working at Bentley's when he first came to Stonebury. nights when she was working late he would meet her coming from her work and escort her home—a thing by the way it had never occurred to Harry to do-and after a while he became one of the select few whom, when they were working very late, Miss French admitted to the workroom to wait for the young ladies. As a known member of the obnoxious railway set ("gang," the natives called them), he at first met with a very chilly reception from the general body of the needle-drivers. But Charley was not only in a conventional sense, but in a natural sense also, a ladies' man. He never felt so happy as when among girls, and his spirits always rose lighter and brighter when in their company. Being a good-looking, easygoing, self-possessed young fellow, with a fair share of conversational powers, and a rather special aptitude for good-humoured banter, he soon overcame the prejudice against him, and became a prime favourite with the ladies of Bentley's. They christened him-among themselves—the Lancashire Lad, and spoke of him as "jolly," especially after he had been to Steperson's and proved himself a first-rate Indeed it was at Steperson's that he dancer. achieved his most signal triumph with them. Bentley's shopmen, and the other highly genteel young men of Stonebury who attended the academy, of course cultivated the languid style They walked through their of dancing. quadrilles, took a slow pace in the round dances, sneered at the mention of country dances, and altogether eschewed galops. But Charley, who had acquired his terpsichorean education at the cheap "hops" of Manchester, would put the VOL. I.

steam on, and as he handled his partners well, and there was grace as well as go in his style, the more dashing of the lady dancers adopted it, and the languid gentlemen had to follow suit. Thus Charley, as the introducer of a new style, became a man of mark in the dancing and needle-driving circles of Stonebury, and it is the knowledge of his acquaintance in those circles that induces Harry Mason to ask—

"I say, Charley, who is that girl?"

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and having been for a stroll together they were leisurely sauntering towards town again down the Abbotsgate road, up which the girl to whom Harry's question referred was coming. Following the direction of his friend's glance until his own fell upon the advancing girl just as she was turning into one of the large houses on the road, Charley, with an incredulous smile, replied by exclaiming—

"Oh, dear, how very green we are!"

"Well, I daresay she's some one that every-body ought to know," retorted Mason, in a rather piqued tone, "but then, you see, I don't come out much, and aren't acquainted with any of the lady-killers besides you, and so, strange as it may appear to you, though I know her well enough by sight, and know that you are sweet on her, I haven't the least idea who she is,"

- "Well, my dear fellow, there's no need to be either ill-tempered or eloquent about it, I did fancy you were trying to draw me on, and I think you must confess that it was much more likely that I should suppose so than that I should believe it possible that a young fellow who is a native of Stonebury, and who has had a sister apprenticed at Bentley's, did not know Kate Fairfield, the queen of the needle-drivers, when he saw her."
- "Holloa! who is being eloquent now? And so that's the great Kate, is it? Well, when you come to think of it, it is rather strange that I shouldn't have known her."
- "What do you think of her now you do know her?"
- "Think!" exclaimed Mason, with an enthusiasm in his voice which was not all assumed, "why, that she's the bonniest Kate in Christendom, and does credit to your taste."
 - "Shall I introduce you to her?"
- "No, thank you; I don't care for being the odd man where three's no company."
- "Now look here, Harry," said Charley, still further slackening their already slow pace, "I don't know whether you have any particular reason for harping on that string, but whether you have or not, you're quite mistaken."
- "Oh, of course," interrupted Harry, with an air of mock candour.

"Well, you are. I know that there are plenty of bouncing fellows who put those sort of stories about concerning themselves, or deny them with a snigger that contradicts the denial, and so damage a girl's character or injure her prospects; but it's in order to prevent anything of that kind that I tell you you are mistaken."

"Well then, I'm mistaken, but you needn't be so solemn about it, for all that. I merely spoke from having seen you with her once or twice, and hearing our Fan chaff you about her. I meant no scandal either about Queen Kate or your chivalrous self."

"I don't suppose you did; but don't you see if I had let you go on talking about me being sweet on Kate, and three not being company, and all the rest of it, you would have just had the sort of impression that the sniggering kind of fellows try to give people; and if it had come in the way, you'd have told any one as a fact that Kate and I were courting."

"Plato, thou reasonest well! I would—appearances were in favour of the belief."

"Well, as far as that goes, Kate and I are very good friends, but as to anything in the shape of sweethearting between us, that's quite up another street. I don't think I would suit Kate's book, and I'm sure she wouldn't suit mine. I like her very well in her way, and without bragging I think I may say she likes me, and had circumstances

permitted, the liking might have grown to something stronger."

"If circumstances had permitted. Oh, we're getting mysterious now! 'I am not, love, what I appear!' and all that sort of thing."

"I'll tell you what it is, Harry, you've got a very bad habit of seeing too far through a millstone; it'll get you into trouble some day."

"That means, I suppose, that there is no mystery?"

"It simply means that if Kate was as useful as she is ornamental, or either of us were as rich as she's handsome, we might have been something more than friends; as it is, I can only say God help any poor man who gets her! He'd much better, for both of them, love her and leave her."

"There! there!" interrupted Mason, in a bantering tone, "say no more; it's very evident that you are not in love with her, or you'd not philosophize about it in that cold-blooded style. Love has instinct, but no philosophy."

"That last, it strikes me, is intended to be a philosophical axiom; but however, here comes Kate, and if you want to make her acquaintance, here's a chance."

"No, I'm not properly cleaned up now; some other time. I'll stroll up the road again." And so saying Mason left his companion, muttering to himself as he went, "If I had a little of your

cheek, and vou had a little of my talent, Master Charley, we would both be the better for the exchange." Harry, as will be easily seen from this remark of his, was a young gentleman who strongly "fancied himself." He was, in a superficial way, really a clever fellow, and he not only knew it, but imagined himself to be still cleverer than he was: and like all others who overrate their own ability, made the mistake of underrating the abilities of others. In a general way he was sufficiently cheeky, not to say arrogant, but having been very little among girls, he lacked his usual confidence when they were in question, and it was his knowledge of this want of self-confidence—for he put it to himself that he had all the necessary power for shining in female society if he "could only put the cheek on"-that made him wish for a portion of Charley Thompson's ease of manner where girls were concerned. Charley had not been altogether mistaken in supposing that Harry had been trying to "draw him on." The latter had recently taken to knocking about the town in the evenings more frequently than he had formerly done, and having on several occasions seen Kate, and been struck with her appearance, and in a less pleasant way with the number of gentlemen acquaintances she seemed to have, he had been desirous of ascertaining who she was, and had before thought of asking Charley Thompson, but had hesitated about doing so without some such excuse Kate's appearance on the Abbotsgate road that evening had given him, lest he should be chaffed. And chaffed he probably would have been, even as it was, had it not been that Charlev had also a little double game to play. Although he was not Fanny Mason's avowed lover, was not in the general acceptation of the term keeping company with her, he knew that she would with reason feel grieved and hurt if it ever fell out that she was to hear through her brother, and as coming from himself, that he was courting Kate Remembering this, he had been as Fairfield. anxious to impress upon Harry that he was merely upon friendly terms with Kate, as Harry had been to learn who and what that young lady was: and hence he had spoken more seriously, and sententiously, and possibly less sincerely, than he would otherwise have done.

While they had been speaking about Kate they had passed the house into which she had gone, and during the latter part of their conversation had been standing a little way below it, so that on turning up the road again on parting from his companion, Harry Mason had to pass Kate, at whom he involuntarily glanced with an admiration which he could not conceal or she fail to perceive; but while he blushed painfully as their eyes met, she remained perfectly unruffled. She was used to such incidents, and

being a vain girl, and one who, as she would herself have put it, would stand looking at, rather liked them. She was of full medium height, with a good figure, graceful carriage, and features just sufficiently irregular to save her face from any charge of being merely statuesque, while leaving it bewitchingly pretty and expressive. a soft clear skin, a complexion in which the were nicely blended: dark red and white brown hair and large soft brown eyes, with a wonderful range and power of expression. which could with equal ease carry out the most delicate by-play, or assume a look of innocent wonderment or serene unconsciousness, and in so far that they were capable of expressing any sentiment at will, were truly speaking eyes. In the small round chin, the childishly pretty mouth, and the general expression of the lower part of her face, a physiognomist might have seen indications of a thoughtlessness and irresolution of character to which, rather than to any set purpose or deliberate heartlessness, he would have attributed the fact of her being an arrant flirt. But even a critical physiognomist would have acknowledged that her face was a remarkably attractive one. Quite attractive enough, as it lights up with a smile at his approach, to account for Charley Thompson, now that he was under its influence, saluting Kate with a warmth of manner that was hardly consistent with the tone in which he had spoken to Harry Mason.

It was only "Well, Kate," "Well, Charley," and a shake of the hand when they met; but there was a softness in their voices, and a sympathetic clingingness about the grasp of their hands, which was far more expressive than their simple words, and fully bore out Charley's saying that the friendship between them might easily have ripened into a stronger feeling.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WORK-ROOM.

OING as he

OING into town again?" asked Charley, as he released her hand.

"Yes," answered Kate, holding up a small parcel which she carried in her left hand, "I've only been down here to show a lady some trimmings. I have to go back to the shop for a while yet; there's a few of us staying to finish some things."

"Any chance for a light porter?" asked Charley, smiling, and looking towards the parcel.

"Oh, yes; you can come if it wont be taking you out of your way."

"It wont be taking me out of my way; the question is, will it be taking me into anybody else's—into Mr. Parker's, for instance?"

"You needn't be afraid of him, Charley."

"I don't know so much about that, Kate; I've noticed lately that he looks mighty fierce at any fellow he sees speaking to you."

"Well, I haven't noticed that," said Kate, with a little laugh. "But what I meant was that you

wouldn't care whether or not you displeased Mr. Parker."

"Nor I don't know so much about that either," said Charley, a merry twinkle in his eye contradicting the affected seriousness of his tone. "I wouldn't care much about him in a general way certainly; but then, you see, he is not in a general way, he's a to-be-continued-in-our-next kind of character. Our high-souled hero. My hated rival! Pistols for two and breakfast for one; and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Oh, come now, Charley," said Kate, shaking her head and smiling as she spoke, "I wont have him chaffed in that way. A fellow needn't be as bad as that if he does spoon me."

"I didn't mean it that way. So far as that goes his spooning you is the one redeeming point in his character; but you know, Katc, he's privately of opinion that he is the long-lost heir of some great nobleman, who some day will turn up and claim his che-ild; or even if that doesn't come off, he'll throw you over when he has captivated one of the rich ladies who come shopping to your place. You'd better have had me, Kate."

"Oh, you are sweet on little Fanny Mason."

[&]quot; Am I?"

[&]quot;Why, you know you are."

[&]quot;Now that's where you are mistaken, that's just what I don't know. I know she's a noble little girl, and worthy of a hundred times better

a fellow than me, and I know that I think a great deal of her, and that I am often desperately in love with her while I am in her company; but whether I'm sweet on her in the exclusive sense in which you mean it, is what I don't know. I'll tell you a thing I do know, though," he continued, suddenly resuming his bantering tone, as if wishing to change the subject of discourse.

"What's that?"

"Why, if I had five hundred a year I'd have no doubt about being sweet on you."

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Kate, opening her eyes wide, and assuming a look of rather indignant surprise. "Let's hope there's not many of your way of thinking, for if I'm not to be tackled under five hundred a year, I'm afraid there's not much chance for me."

"And, 'Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Charley, imitating as well as he could Kate's look and tone of surprise; "I thought you had ideas far above even five hundred a year."

"Well, perhaps I had, and I daresay I could spend a good deal more if I could get it, and do as well with it as many who do get it, but at the same time I daresay I could do as well as others on a good deal less."

"On as little as Mr. Parker's wages, let us say?" put in Charley.

"If I could manage with him I've no doubt I could manage with his wages," retorted Kate,

somewhat warmly. And as she spoke—for there had been pauses in their discourse, and they had been walking rather sharply—they came to a standstill at the end of the passage in which was situated the entrance to Bentley's work-rooms.

"Oh,don't get ill-tempered, Kate," said Charley, looking at her in a half coaxing, half penitent sort of way, as they stood facing each other in the archway of the passage.

"Well then, don't you reckon me up at such a price as that again," she answered, a smile chasing the slight cloud from her face.

"Well, I wont; and now may I come up and be the big brother for to-night? I'm all right with Miss French; she knows that I'm a nice young man that will take care of you and see you home properly."

"Very well then, come along," she answered, leading the way to the work-room, on entering which she said—speaking in a manner suggestive of her having just accidentally met Charley on the staircase—"Here's a friend come to see you, Miss French."

It was a good-sized room, eighteen or twenty feet long by about ten or twelve broad. The roof was very low for these proportions; but as the apartment was an upper one, this was not the sanitary evil that it would have been in the middle or basement stories of the premises, especially as there was a large skylight in the

centre and a ventilator at either end of the ceiling. About the wall hung a number of patterns in various coloured papers, and here and there was pasted a coloured fashion plate. At various parts round the sides of the room stood sewingmachines, and down the centre ran a long table heaped with work in various stages of progression. At the head of this table now sat Miss French. busily engaged in arranging and tacking trimmings on a dress. Like others of her class, Miss French had occasionally to act as a driver towards her subordinates; but more fortunate or more amiable than most forewomen, she was a general favourite with the girls under her, who one and all pronounced her "A dear creature!" She was five-and-twenty, but being of a neat dapper figure, and having a small round face, she looked younger, though owing to a little circumstance in her career she was always spoken of as though she had been much older. Miss French had had her little romance. She had loved and She had been engaged, the "voung gentleman" being a junior clerk in the Stonebury Bank. He had in certain senses been emphatically a fine fellow. His had been a fine figure and a fine face, and he had been especially fine in the matter of moustache and chest, of which latter. in conjunction with a tremendous amount of shirt front, he had been wont to make a great display, even going to the extremity, some people

had said, of wearing stays to enhance the symmetry of his appearance. He had been greatly given to billiards and betting, and like the generality of men strongly endowed with those proclivities, had a decided inclination for an idle or, at any rate, an irregular mode of life, and had made no secret among his booncompanions that he merely intended to secure the little milliner with a view to being able to lead For Miss French, being an energetic manager and one of the cleverest cutters and fitters in the trade, commanded a good salary. Tomarry this salary and turn professional bettingman had been a favourite notion with the young gentleman, but he was fated to go under the turf ere he could carry out his idea of going upon it. A cold, aggravated by an unwise display of the chest, brought on an attack of inflammation of the lungs, from which—fortunately for Miss French, though of course she did not think so-he died a fortnight before he was to have been married. Having, like the rest of his stamp, whether rich or poor, lived above his income-being without relations, and not having been the kind of servant to establish any claim to special consideration from his employers—he would have been laid in a pauper's grave had it not been for the girl who had loved him. When she found how things were, she quietly gave orders for a respectable funeral, "went into black" herself, and mourned for him

-mourned for him as the noble fellow she had believed him to be, not as the worthless scamp he had really been. Among the needle-drivers it was popularly supposed that she was solemnly pledged-though when or under what circumstances the vow had been made never appeared —to a life-long wearing of the willow for his And knowing the outlines of her little love romance they regarded her in much the same light that they did the love-stricken heroines of the tales in their favourite serials. they would sometimes say among themselves that she reminded them of the Lady Clare in that memorable—in penny-serial circles—novel, "Harold Harcourt's Birth-mark; or, the Brand of Blood;" or of Milly Maddison in the scarcely less notable work, "The Noble Betrayer; or, a Poor Girl's Vengeance." Though she affected not to notice it. Miss French was in a quiet sentimental way rather pleased with this. If upon the one hand it had the drawback of causing her to be spoken of in a way implying that she could no longer have any direct personal interest in love affairs, on the other it placed her in the position of an authority upon matters of love and sentiment, as they affected others. Thus the young gentleman was of greater advantage to her dead than living; as a loafing husband, sponging upon her earnings, he would have been a terrible nuisance, while as a

dead lover he was for purposes of sentiment as good as the best.

On one side of the table sat three girls, who being given to going to extremes in those fashions in which the female dress closely approached the masculine, and to taking their evening and Sunday promenades together in a dashing, not to say rakish style, had come to be known as "The Dauntless Three." Nicknames were rife among the needle-drivers, but as—with the exception perhaps of the title of "The Long Company," bestowed on four tall girls who were close companions—they were for the most part of a pretty and flattering kind, the general body of them did not object to the practice. Opposite to the Dauntless Three sat Nelly Gibbons, Queen Kate's chosen companion, who, being a really good singer, and a favourite performer at the Stonebury Penny Readings, and other amateur entertainments at which music formed part of the programme, was popularly known among her own set as the Prima Donna.

The bulk of the hands having left work at the usual hour of eight o'clock, the girls here particularized were the only ones in the work-room when Charley Thompson entered it, and each of them being acquainted with him, greeted him with a nod or smile.

"Well, Charley, you're quite a stranger," said Miss French, taking a number of pins from her vol. 1. mouth in order to speak; "you hardly ever come to see us since Fanny left."

"I haven't the same excuse for coming now," said Charley. "None of the others will have me for a big brother."

"That's a very fine excuse for not coming."

"Well, he couldn't have come at a better time than this," put in the Prima Donna, as Miss French paused for a moment to look at the effect of the trimming she was laying on—"the pic-nic, you know."

"Oh yes, that's well thought of," exclaimed Miss French, quickly glancing up from her work. "Charley, our annual pic-nic comes off on Saturday, and we want another nice young fellow or two to make up the party, so you'd better come, and bring some one else with you. What do you say?"

"Oh, I say I'll be very proud of the chance."

"And who will you bring with you?"

"Why, let me see," he said, musingly. "Oh, I'll tell you," he exclaimed, after a brief pause; "Harry Mason, Fan's brother; that was him you saw me with just now," he added, in an explanatory aside in reply to an interrogative glance from Kate. "He comes out of his time on Friday, and is going to give a bit of a supper to his friends on the strength of it, and I don't suppose he'll care about going in to work on the Saturday, so I'll bring him with me."

"What sort of a fellow is he?" asked the youngest of the Dauntless Three, without looking up from her work.

"Just the sort of fellow Miss French says you want—a nice young fellow."

"He's a nice-looking fellow, anyway; I know him by sight," said Nelly Gibbons.

"Perhaps he's like a job-master's screw—a good 'un to look at, but a bad 'un to go," said another of the Dauntless ones, the three considering it due to the maintenance of their reputation to be slangy, and the particular speaker being at feud with the Prima Donna.

"Well, if any of the gentlemen should happen to be a little slow, we'll have Tomboys enough amongst us to make up for that, with their horseplay," retorted Nelly.

The Dauntless one was about to make some angry reply, when Kate, with a view to preserving peace, observed—"Well, I've never seen him out anywhere; I suppose he is a bit of a slow-coach."

"Oh dear no," replied Charley. "He might be a little backward on coming among a lot of girls for the first time, but in a general way he is anything but slow. On the contrary, he's decidedly go-ahead, and he'll just suit you. He'll talk to you in the language of the poets, my dear. But at the same time," he added, looking towards the young lady who had had

the passage of arms with the Prima Donna, "if Tilly there objects, of course I wont bring him."

"I don't object, Charley," said Tilly, in a tone expressive of her being hurt and surprised at the possibility of any one entertaining such an idea. "I know you wouldn't bring a wet blanket; only there's some people," and here she tossed her head, and glanced across the table, "who can't stand a bit of chaff."

"Come now, that'll do, Tilly," interposed Miss French, authoritatively: and then Charley, by way of taking the conversation from dangerous ground, asked,—"Where's the pic-nic to be?"

- "At the Beacon," answered Miss French.
- "And how are you going?"

"By road. We've engaged a couple of breaks."

One or another of those present answered Charley's further questions, and the conversation becoming general again, the pic-nic was discussed during the remainder of the half hour for which the girls worked.

On getting outside, the Dauntless Three expressed their intention of having just one turn round the town before going home, but Kate and Nelly, who were making themselves new dresses for the pic-nic, decided upon going home direct, and walking, truth to tell, in a rather swaggering style between them, and feeling very proud of his position, Charley took his way

towards Fairview, in which district both himself and the girls resided. Nelly's home was the first reached, and there she bid good night to her companions. Kate lived in a side street to which there was a near cut by a field pathway, and at the gate at the far end of the field she was in the habit of dismissing her escort. On reaching it this evening she, as usual, came to a standstill, and offering her hand to Charley, bid him good night.

"Well, good night, Kate," he said, detaining and pressing her hand, and then sighing he exclaimed, in a half-serious half-jesting way, "Oh dear, I wish I had the five hundred a year."

"Then, as I wish you well, Charley, I wish you had."

- "I wish I had, for I'm very bad."
- "Bad!" echoed Kate, with a puzzled look, which few could have detected as assumed.
 - "Lovesick, you know."
- "Oh, is that all? I suppose that's what you say whenever you are with a girl?"
- "That's what I feel whenever I'm with a girl, but not any girl."
- "Only when you are with Fanny Mason then, I suppose?"
 - "Or Kate Fairfield."
- "Oh, I see! What's that the Prima Donna says sometimes, out of a song you know? Oh, I

remember! 'How happy could I be with either.' That's how it is with you, I suppose, Master Charley?"

"Well, perhaps there is something of that sort about my complaint; but whether there is or not, I know I feel in a very can't-help-it sort of state just now; and if I had the five hundred a year, that would settle the matter as far as I am concerned. What do you say?"

"Get off with your nonsense."

"Well, I think I'd better, for I shall have to go at last; so good night," and he released her hand.

"Good night, Charley," she returned, moving away; but when she had gone a few steps she paused, and called back, "Remember the pic-nic!" To which Charley, assuming a mock heroic voice and attitude, replied,

"Trust me, dear one, I will be there." Then lowering his voice, as a sort of vocal pointing, added, as he slowly turned on his heel, "Exit disconsolate lover;" and with a mutual smile and wave of the hand, they went their several ways.

CHAPTER V.

FANNY'S HERO.

RS. MASON was "a chapel woman," a sister of a Methodist "connexion," which, like many other religious connexions, was constantly in want of money. Doctrinally the connexion was above the things of this world, but, as a matter of fact, the brethren and sisters were always being informed that those worldly things, "funds," were re-

quired.

Brother Waggley, a pious, poor man's broker, with considerably less bowels of compassion, and greater powers of professional lying in disparagement of the goods he wished to buy than the majority of the non-pious members of his craft—Brother Waggley, who to his worldly calling added that of local preacher, would hold forth for an hour at a time upon the sinfulness of caring for anything that was only for this life. To be proud of your miserable bodies, to array them in purple and fine linen, to seek after the lust of the flesh, or the amusements of the

worldly, to complain of disease, or grieve for the loss of friends, was, according to Waggley, to be desperately unregenerate and wicked. But to care for filthy lucre! for wretched money! dross! To wish to possess earthly treasure! O my sinful companions, there was the crowning wickedness. At the conclusion of a tirade of this kind, however, Waggley would coolly read one of the usual announcements that funds were wanted, and after the manner of the black preacher mentioned by Captain Marryat, would pretty plainly intimate his opinion that those who did not subscribe would go to hell.

Funds were required for paying the debt upon or repairing the local chapel, or building a new one elsewhere: or for the support of a missionary enterprise associated with the connexion, or to advance the pay of some rising light among the preachers who had been coming out strong on the text, "The labourer is worthy of his hire." For these and a host of other purposes money was so often wanted that the leaders of the connexion did not always deem it prudent to ask for it directly, especially as in tea-parties they had a pleasant and efficacious indirect means of raising the wind. To most decided forms of amusement the connexion uncompromisingly objected, and chapel tea-parties, as the most prominent and frequent of those in which they could openly indulge, accordingly found much

favour in their sight. These parties brought the vounger members together in a festive way. a large proportion of the marriages in the connexion being accomplished through their instrumentality. For the women generally they formed a wider, more exhilarating "school for scandal" than was afforded by their smaller home tea-drinkings. And they suited preachingly inclined, as they brought within the reach of their awakening discourses outsiders who would not attend the chapel in an ordinary way. The parties were organized by the congregation upon the co-operative principle, the wealthier members, who were for the most part shopkeepers, contributing the materials and lending furniture, and the poorer ones giving their services in preparing and laying out the tea and attending to the guests at the party. this work there was no one more energetic than Sister Mason, to whom had been assigned the charge of one of the largest tables at a party that was to take place on the afternoon succeeding the evening on which Charley Thompson had seen Queen Kate home. Charley's landlady, who also belonged to the tea-party-giving connexion, had of course taken a ticket for the entertainment, but had not intended to go to it until on the morning Mrs. Mason had asked her to come and assist her in the management of the table.

"Well, as the master's working overtime I would go in a minute," she replied; "only, you see, there's Charley's tea to be got ready."

"Oh, if that's all," said Mrs. Mason, "that's soon settled. Fanny is going to stay at home to make tea for our Harry, and she can make it for Charley as well."

"Well, yes; that would do if Charley was agreeable," his landlady answered; and Mrs. Mason, with a rather knowing smile, said "there was no danger of his not being agreeable."

At dinner time it was ascertained that Charley was agreeable; indeed, he appeared to be very much pleased with the idea, and so his "things"—the sportingly cut suit of dark tweeds which usually formed his evening dress, were taken into Mason's, and little Fanny was informed that she was to make tea for him.

Everybody called her little, and yet she was by no means strikingly small. Once, when this matter had come up in a half jesting way, Charley Thompson had spoken of her as being just a nice armful of love, while her brother, who had been reading Don Quixote, and never lost an opportunity of bringing out a quotation, added, in his oratorial manner.

> "Her body is but small, 'tis true, Yet has a soul as large as two;"

and this was a pretty good description of her, for

though a girl whom a man could comfortably encircle and press to his heart with his one arm, she had twice the energy, self-reliance, and general nobility of character of many a grand looking woman of a two-armsful build. She was an inch or two under medium height, certainly vet there were shorter girls whom no one ever spoke of as Little Bella So-and-So, or Little Minnie What's-her-Name. But there was a roundness and plumpness about Fanny's prettily proportioned figure, a sprightliness in her movements, and a piquancy in her manner, which in her case not merely gave a characterizing expressiveness to the adjective, but seemed to impel people to couple it with her name. The Tightwaist ladies had called her a little creature, and among her friends she was little Miss Mason, or little Fanny, or little Dimples. This last was the sobriquet by which she was known among the needle-drivers, who had bestowed it upon her out of compliment to the three delicious dimples—one on the chin, and one on either cheek—that were the most prominent beauties of her face, which had the further attractions of a pretty pouting pair of lips, a clear olive-tinted complexion, that blended admirably with glossy black hair, worn in short tangled curls, fine dark eyes, and a general softness of outline; altogether as pretty, cheery, and loving a face as any reasonable male being would wish to see.

And never had it worn a prettier or more animated expression than it did on this afternoon, when she set about preparing tea for Charley—to her a labour of love, for Charley was her self-selected hero.

A very unheroic hero, it may be said; and I can only answer, True, O intelligent reader. But then, Fanny saw him not with your discriminating eves, but by the heroizing light of a first love. Like other young girls, she had her dreamings and fancy-paintings of a lover-hero, but her imaginings in this respect had been unlike those of the generality of her class, unworthily unlike them, the class would have said. has already been mentioned, she was not a subscriber to the Needle-drivers' Mutual Accommodation Library, her acquaintance with the serials of "The Young Lady's Herald" stamp was confined to an occasional glance at their pictures, and a general idea gathered from the conversation of the other girls, that their literary contents were "iolly." She knew nothing of the details of their leading stories, which were for the most part prose, very prose versions of the "Lord of Burleigh," with the moral reversed. Nor was she naturally of a very ambitious or romantic turn of mind. imaginings, therefore, did not run upon the raven-locked, marble-browed, disguised-nobleman type of hero. The actual surroundings of her life had given colour and direction to her day dreams, which were of a smart young mechanic, such as "our Harry" promised to be; and in Charley Thompson she believed she had found the realization of her ideal—the living embodiment of the bright particular him of her Standing five feet nine, broadimagination. shouldered, strong-limbed, with tolerably regular features, a clear healthy complexion, and brown curly hair, he sufficiently fulfilled her first condition, that her hero must be good-looking. The fact that her father pronounced him rare good company, and that "our Harry" admitted that he was a sensible fellow, and a first-rate workman, confirmed her in her own opinion that he was clever—her second stipulation. his manner to herself, and all that she saw and heard of him convinced her that he was kindthe last of her three leading conditions for a hero-lover, whom she had strictly bargained with herself must be good-looking, clever, and On other points she had told the kind. imaginary bosom friend with whom she had been in the habit of discussing this matter, and whom she could, of course, "put down" in argument, she might be open to a reasonable compromise, but on those three never.

Having found her hero, Fanny would have been contented to have placed him on a pedestal, and worshipped him at a respectful distance, for

when she saw him in the flesh it occurred to her—and the thought gave her a sore pang that so heroic a being would not care about such a homely little girl as her, especially when plenty of dashing girls of the Queen Kate stamp would be glad to have him. But. somehow, the hero did not see the things in this light; he would not be put on the pedestal. He would insist on being friendly, and familiar, and attentive, and this not in the condescending manner of a hero to his votary, but rather in the style of one who was proud to be allowed to be on such a footing with her, and found a pleasure in being of service to her—a mode of proceeding which, for more reasons than one, made her very happy.

Among the gentlemen who "went after" Bentley's needle-drivers, she alone had found no favour. She did not dress so extravagantly as the others; she did not dance or flirt, or do turns round town after leaving off work; she could not chaff, and she had no avowed or would-be lover to cut out. While therefore she was in a patronizing manner allowed to be a nice little girl in her way, that way was voted slow,—"up to nothing, you know;" and so she was neglected, left to go home by herself when the other girls had each their escort. Though she had too much spirit to say anything about it, Fanny had felt this rather bitterly, and it was with a correspond-

ing degree of pride and gratitude that she had at first received the kind attentions of Charley, who had come to Stonebury about six months before her father's death, being at that time just one-Working at the same bench as and-twenty. Harry Mason, and lodging next door to his parents, he had naturally become intimate with the family, and he had not known Fanny many weeks before it became known among the needledrivers and their admirers that "little Dimples had got a fellow to see her home in the evenings." The gentlemen at first spoke contemptuously of him, and subsequently came to hate him as a rival; but with the girls he soon, as has been seen, became a favourite—a combination of circumstances which led to an incident that afforded him an opportunity of showing that he was both able and willing to be Fanny's champion and protector, as well as her gentleman in waiting.

About a mile out of the town, in the Fairview direction, was an old inn, to which was attached a large green, that in the summer was frequently used by dancing parties. One Saturday afternoon Bentley's girls had made up a party for the green, and Charley had persuaded Fanny to make one in it. She had seen plenty of dancing; and sometimes when the girls had been short of one when having a practice among themselves, she had stood up and been pushed through the

figures; and with this little knowledge, and Charley for a partner, she had managed to get through a dance or two tolerably well. She was, of course, more awkward than the practised dancers of the party, and made a few blunders: but this would not have prevented her from enjoying herself, had not some of the most intensely genteel of the male dancers seen in her deficiency a means of annoving Charley. Pleased with this idea they began to stare, and sneer, and snigger at her, as, partly by directions, partly in a literal sense, he pulled her through a dance. was the first to notice their proceedings, and once or twice he glanced savagely at the grinning group, but took no further notice, hoping that the grimacing would cease before Fanny observed His angry looks, however, only encouraged them to continue; and Fanny presently becoming aware of what was going on, her pleasure for the day was instantly destroyed. could not finish the dance, and became so nervously bashful and distressed, that shortly afterwards he took her away. The girls generally had been indignant at witnessing the treatment to which Fanny had been subjected, and more than one of them would have resented it on her behalf. only they had fully expected to see Charley Thompson do so; and as soon as his back was turned they began to give expression to their feelings.

"It was too bad," exclaimed Queen Kate.
"If it had been any one else I wouldn't have cared, but to little Dimples it was downright cruel. She wouldn't have done such a thing to any one, even if they had done her an injury, let alone if they had never done her any harm."

"It was a jolly shame, so far as little Fanny was concerned," said Tilly Smith of the Dauntless Three; "but if a fellow of mine was to be such a coward as Charley Thompson has shown himself, I'd—I'd hit him," and she shook her clenched fist as she spoke. "You may laugh, but he is a coward!" she went on, turning fiercely upon a mate of Charley's whom she saw smiling.

"I think not, Tilly," was the answer, "and I've known him longer than you."

"Well, it looks very like it, anyway," said one of the sniggerers, while the others laughed at his remark.

"Don't you lot make any mistake," answered Charley's friend, facing round on them. "Charley knew he would only have upset Fanny if he kicked up any row before her; but it strikes me you've not seen the last, or for yourselves the worst, of this business, for you may lay long odds that it'll be hot for some of you the next time he comes across you. And, by Jingo!" he exclaimed, in a higher tone, as at that moment Charley came out at the inn-door, "here he is!"

Charley came sauntering up the green in a leisurely, indifferent style; but the teeth-marks on his lips, a twitching about the corners of his mouth, and an involuntary clenching and unclenching of his hands, would have sufficiently indicated to any close observer that his apparent calmness was forced.

"Holloa!" exclaimed Tilly Smith, in a sharp, contemptuous tone, when he had got up to where the dancing party had gathered in a group—"have you left her to go home by herself?"

"No," he answered, without looking at his questioner; "the landlady was just going into town with her trap, and she's taken her."

He paused for a moment or two, looking round the group, and then suddenly strode up to the biggest of the sniggerers, a tall, largely built young fellow, with a florid complexion, which, however, turned very pale as he was thus confronted.

"Look here, you six feet of bad stuff," said Charley, addressing him in a slow, menacing tone, "I ought to have knocked you down first and then spoken to you, but I don't want to take any advantage of you, so just come to the other side of the house, out of sight of the girls, and I'll fight you fairly."

"What do you mean?—what should I fight you for?" asked the sniggerer, in a tone which

he tried to make confident, but could not quite keep from trembling.

"Well, by G—d, you are a cur," was Charley's only answer.

"Oh no, I'm not a cur, but at the same time I'm not going to make a blackguard of myself," replied the sniggerer, again trying unsuccessfully to get up a blustering tone.

"You are a blackguard," exclaimed Charley, in a savagely contemptuous tone; "no one but a cowardly blackguard would have acted as you've done. You wanted to insult me, and being afraid to do it directly, thought you might do it through the girl I was with. But there, you duffer, you made the mistake of judging others by yourself. If you hadn't been the cur you are, you'd have known that any fellow would a thousand times rather be kicked himself than be hit at by even so much as a look at his girl. You might have sniggered at me all day long and I'd have taken no notice of it, but when you do it to my girl on my account, that's up another street; I'd have a cut at any fellow for that, if he was as big as the side of a house. But, however, I didn't come here to make speeches; there's no use in talking to such a character as you; the best appeal to your feelings is to punch your head. and that's what I've come back on purpose to do: and as there's no 'get out' for you, you may as well come to the other side and take it fighting."

"I shall do no such thing; I'm not given to such low practices, if you are," answered the sniggerer, still trying to give a courageous tone to his voice.

"It wont do," said Charley, shaking his head, "you're bound to have it; so put your arms up, for I'm going to begin."

"If you strike me, I'll make you pay for it, mind."

"I'll chance that," answered Charley, "and so here goes." And as he spoke he landed a couple of facers shot straight from the shoulder and sent home with all the strength of passion. On receiving them the sniggerer dropped all in a heap, and altogether refused to comply with Charley's request "to stand up again and have another turn." He struggled into a sitting position, and murmured, "I'll make you pay for this, see if I don't." But beyond this he would not go. So after waiting for a minute or two, Charley, speaking more in his good-humoured way than he had previously done, observed—

"Well, I can't hit a fellow that wont stand up; and now, as I've let the steam off a bit, I'll not make any further bother before the girls—indeed," he added, turning towards them, "I can hardly expect them to forgive me for having made so much."

"You served the big beast quite right!" exclaimed Tilly Smith, stepping forward before

any of the others could speak. "And now I'd better tell you myself, Charley, in case some kind friend should do it for me. When you went away just now I called you a coward, but it was because I thought you weren't going to take any notice of the way in which that lot jeered at little Fanny; so you wont be ill-tempered about it, will you, Charley?"

"Well, no—not if you'll give me the next dance," he answered, smiling and imitating the coaxing way in which she had spoken; "and a kiss as well, you know, when there's a chance, Tilly," he added in a whisper, as with the others they strolled towards the band to resume dancing, leaving Mr. Bradly—for that was the fallen sniggerer's name—to be led home by two sympathizing friends, who condoled with him on the pair of black eyes that Charley had given him, and listened to his song of vengeance, the burden of which was, "I'll make him pay!"

Charley had not wished Fanny to have known of this affair, but going to work on the Monday morning, she happened to overtake Tilly Smith, and that lively young lady speedily enlightened her. "I don't want to make you jealous, Dimples," she said, as soon as they had exchanged good mornings, "but I shall always like Charley Thompson for the way in which he took down big Bradly for trying to make game of you." And then finding from Fanny's reply

that she was ignorant of the whole affair, proceeded to give her the details of it in a narrative laden with much slang and innumerable "says he's."

When a few evenings later Fanny met Charley, she made a little show of scolding him for what he had done, though it was easily to be seen that she was really very proud of his performance—proud of his personal prowess, and proud of his championship of herself. From that time forth she added a laurel wreath to the heroic crown with which she had adorned him, and more important still, began to think of him as more exclusively hers than she had hitherto done—to think of him as her man of men, her Charley, with whom of course nobody else's Charley was for a moment to be compared.

A few weeks later a yet more decisive stage in the progress of her feelings towards Charley was reached. Mrs. Mason, in common with the rest of the tea-party "connexion," held, among other articles of belief, that the theatre was a devil's den, a sort of avowed half-way house on the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Partly for this reason, partly for pecuniary reasons, and because nobody had ever asked her to go, it happened that Fanny had never been inside a theatre, until one night Charley, having gained a rather reluctant consent from her mother, took her there.

The company was a scratch "commonwealth" one on a flying tour, and dependent on the stock appliances of the theatres they could hire. In the case of Stonebury those appliances were of so scanty an order as to necessitate the utter perversion of the scenic unities, while the gag of the actors was for the most part as incongruous to the characters they represented as the scenery was to the places it did not represent. gether the performances offered to the public of Stonebury on that night—the visit of the company was wisely arranged for one night onlywas of a kind for sitting out which most playgoers would have considered themselves entitled to substantial compensation; but to Mason the whole thing was enchanting. new pleasure had opened before her. She laughed till the tears ran down her face over the opening farce, and the mimic world of the stage became real to her during the progress of "Belphegor," over whose sorrows she softly wept. Once or twice in the early part of the evening she murmured, "Oh, Charley, isn't it nice?" and Charley, happy at seeing her so pleased, got hold of her hand under her shawl, and whispered " Beautiful!" With her hand thus clasped in his, and all her faculties intent upon the play, she sat till the finish as in wonderland. in this dreamy frame of mind she went home in the soft summer night, it somehow stood revealed

to her either that gratitude had grown to love, or what she had hitherto considered to be the milder sentiment had, without her being perfectly aware of it, all along been the stronger one. walked by Charley's side, giving expression to the wonder and delight she had experienced at the play, she knew that she loved him with the whole strength of her heart—loved him, not as a brother or for having paid her attentions which no other had ever done, but as a lover, the man whom of all others in the world she would prefer for her As she confessed this to herself she experienced an almost overwhelming sense of happiness, and it spoke well for her self-possession that at such a moment she scarcely faltered in her chat or tightened her grasp on Charlev's arm.

When she had left him her thoughts were less controlled. "All night long his face before her lived, and held her from her sleep." At one moment she was tumultuously happy in the thought of her love; then with the question, "But does he love me?" came a sense of tormenting uncertainty. Did he love her in the way in which she now knew she loved him, or had her first idea that his attentions were merely prompted by seeing her neglected been correct? He undoubtedly sought her society at times when there was no necessity for doing so on the latter ground alone, and he had thrashed big

Bradly for annoying her. But then, on the other hand, he had never declared himself her This was the problem that she debated as she lay awake that night, the problem that she thought over, and was unhappy about for many succeeding days and nights, until that to her ever-memorable evening on which when giving her the sewing-machine he had taken her in his arms and kissed her. In that supremely happy moment her problem was solved to her own satisfaction. There was a softness in his look, a tremble in his voice, a warmth in his kiss. a tenderness in his embrace, that to her simple mind gave assurance of love, and she was content without verbal confirmation, believing that her hero would speak in his own good time.

CHAPTER VI.

AT TEA, AND AFTER.

HE cottages which occupied the one side of the Fairview road were broken into lengths by side streets branching off the

road, the various lengths being of course gen-But to mark their disapproval of teelly named. the intrusion into the district of people not following genteel employments, the natives had bestowed the title of Smoky Row upon the block in which the workmen from the railway chiefly resided, and by this name the cottages soon became far better known than by their postal In one of the houses one of Fairview Crescent. in this row the Masons lived, having moved into it some three years before poor Joe's death. first it had been a rather unpleasant abidingplace for them, owing to the circumstance that Joe, though a native of Stonebury, had gone over So far he would not to the railway interests. have been extremely exceptional: others beside him had joined the railway—had become porters and clerks in its service; but clerking ranks as

a genteel occupation, and the porters had respected the genteel unities by continuing to live in the Castle Bridge district. Joe, however, had attached himself to the railway interests with what his fellow-townsmen had regarded as an outrageous, not to say traitorous thorough-He had shown no sense of shame at the face and clothes-begriming nature of his work: he had taken kindly to the railway people and they to him: worse than all, he had, by coming. to Fairview, shown himself so selfish as to consider his own convenience before the claims of local gentility; all this making up a degree of turpitude which had caused the Stoneburvites of Fairview to look upon him when he had first came among them as a kind of horrid example. But this first bitterness of the stauncher natives he had lived down by sheer good humour. had met their frowns with smiles, and conquered, and in time had come to be regarded simply as one of the railway set, who, as a Stoneburyite, perfectly assimilated to the ways of invading and non-genteel aliens, was something of a natural curiosity. It was in this light that the familyto whom the first feeling of hostility had also extended—were now regarded both by the natives and their neighbours in Smoky Row.

The houses in the Row—they were of a uniform build—were very comfortable ones, such houses as, at their rental of four and sixpence a

week, the working classes of the metropolis and other large places can only hope for or dream of. They had a small railed-in flower-patch in front, and at the back a garden containing an apple tree or two, and having the gravel walk down the centre lined out with fruit bushes. they consisted of three bedrooms, a parlour. kitchen, and back-kitchen, which latter, as it was fitted up with a copper, also served as a wash-As a rule they were nicely kept, and for the position in life of their occupants well furnished, and in these respects none of them excelled Mrs. Mason's. It was scarcely a figure of speech to say that her house looked like a little palace, while there was an air of coziness about it which could never have been found in a veritable palace. The parlour was the stateroom of the establishment, being only used on Sundays and special occasions. In this apartment the "best" furniture was of course displayed, and though the best in this case was but poor, it made, under Mrs. Mason's management, a passably good show. The carpet was admittedly only imitation Brussels, but the pattern had been selected with an especial view to not showing the dirt, and it had been watchfully preserved from fading or stains. The hair-stuffed, imitation mahogany framed, Brummagem-made sofa, and half a dozen plain and two easy-chairs to match, would soon

have tumbled to pieces in use, but they had been used very little and polished very much, and still looked as good as new, and the same might be said of the veneered centre table and the chest of drawers, on the top of which latter was arranged a show of crystal. Over the chimneypiece stood a pier-glass, which, though anything but true as a reflector, was by reason of a large intricately moulded and highly gilt frame, great as an ornament. Above the glass were a number of framed photographic portraits, and below it, standing on the chimneypiece, was at either end a small lustre, and in the centre an imitation marble figure of a Watteau costumed shepherdess mounted on an imitation ebony stand, and enclosed in a glass shade; lustres and ornament having been obtained in the way of barter from one of those hawkers who, after the manner of the African magician in "Aladdin," go about exchanging new articles for old-new crockeryware and chimney-ornaments for old hats and On the side opposite to the fireplace stood the sofa, above which, supported on brackets, was a small book-case containing some of the best of Harry's volumes. On the centre table were a large, handsomely-bound, profuselyillustrated family Bible, two or three smaller books in showy bindings-which, as they had fallen to Harry as school prizes, and bore inscriptions to that effect, were regarded as valuable family heirlooms—an album filled with the portraits of friends and acquaintances, a pair of polished sea-shells, on applying which to their ears persons of strong imagination said they could hear the murmur of the ocean, and one or two other cheap but in their way interesting articles of knicknackery.

In the way of pictorial adornment there were -in addition to the photographs over the chimneypiece—an engraving of the Crucifixion, a large, lithographed portrait of a certain shining light of the "connexion," a coloured emblem of the particular "Ancient Order" of which Joe had been a member, and a likeness in oil-suggestive of the old fifty-shilling-portrait club school of art-of some gentleman unknown, Mrs. Mason having picked it up cheap at a sale for the sake of its frame, which now regilded looked very well. The drawers stood opposite to the window, which was shaded by long curtains, and flanked on either side by the easy-chairs, while the other chairs filled up the odd corners, so that the room. being a small one, looked amply as well as nicely furnished, and upon the whole justified Mrs. Mason in feeling rather proud of it.

The kitchen was considerably larger than the parlour, being about twelve feet long by nine or ten broad, and as the living room of the household was more plainly and substantially furnished. There was no carpet on its bright red-tiled floor.

Its chairs were strong Windsor ones. The larger of its two tables was of oak, and the other of strong deal. The ornamental and useful were combined in the large sideboard, on which, when not in use, the family plates and dishes were displayed, while the more purely ornamental was represented by the highly polished array of copper and block-tin saucepan-lids which hung above, and brass candlesticks with snuffers and snuffer-trays to match, which stood upon the chimneypiece.

It was in this apartment that, about a quarter to six, Fanny was busily engaged in making tea. She had at first thought of having it in the parlour, for though that room was usually reserved for Sunday visitors, Charley was in her opinion parlour company even on week-days.

But remembering his objection to occupying a pedestal, and fearing he might think her "fussy," she ultimately decided upon compromising the matter by having the tea in the kitchen, but using the parlour tray and tea-service. The tray was already arranged, the pot with the tea ready "masked" was on the hob, while on a stand before the fire were bristling a couple of bloaters, on which Fanny kept a watchful eye as she cut the bread and butter. This was the extent of the tea—a simple enough meal certainly; so simple that any person acquainted with the quiet, self-possessed manner in which

Fanny usually went about her work, would have been surprised at the excitement she betrayed in its preparation—at the way in which she fluttered about between the fireplace and the table, turning and returning the herring, adding a slice or two to the plates of bread, or making some slight and altogether unnecessary alteration in the arrangement of the tray. That is, they would have been surprised unless they had happened to know for whom besides her brother she was making tea. The fact that it was for Charley Thompson, took it in Fanny's estimation out of the ordinary category of tea-making. Once or twice before, when he had dropped in to see Harry on a rainy Sunday, he had stayed to a cup of tea, but this was a very different affair. Now she was making tea for him as she would have to do-and she blushed in a half-pleasurable, half-bashful way as the idea occurred to her-if she was his wife. Might he not take the same view of it too-might he not privately take it as a criterion of her housewifely capabilities? And as she thought of these things, this particular tea-making assumed in her mind an importance which did not pertain to it intrinsically.

And how was her hero, the object of all this love and solicitude, affected towards her? Well, he had pretty accurately described his feelings when talking to Queen Kate. He knew that he thought more highly of her than of any

other girl; that she was the only girl of whom he ever had a serious thought when away from her, and that she was by far the best girl of his But his was one of those unacquaintance. stable natures that was more or less in love with any pretty girl, so long as he was with them: and this gave him doubts as to whether or not he was really in love with Fanny in the ordinary acceptation of the term. If he had had any idea of marrying soon he would not, he told himself, have had a moment's hesitation as to her being the girl he would have asked to have been his wife. But then he was not going to marry soon; had no intention of doing anything of the kind for four or five years to come. In common with many of the rising school of artisans he looked upon the early marriages that had once been the rule among his class, as a mistake—a mistake both as regarded the persons immediately concerned and the class generally. A young fellow was now expected to knock about for a few years, and during this period a wife and family were really an encumbrance. Look at himself, for instance; he had served his time in a machine-shop in Manchester; had come to Stonebury to get an insight into locomotive work; and shortly intended to be off to London or the North, to have a turn among the marineengine shops, with a view to qualifying himself as a sea-going engineer; and there was no VOL. I. 8

knowing where he might get to before he was in a position to settle down, so that it would be preposterous to think of marrying, or even entering into any long provisional engagement. knew that Fanny liked him, and he was very fond of her society; and as there was no one particular after her, there was no harm in his doing the attentive to her, provided he didn't commit himself any further. This was how Charley Thompson put it to himself; how he tried to excuse himself to himself for doing what in his heart he knew to be wrong, if not actually dishonourable: how he stultified his conscience because he had not sufficient courage or nobility of purpose either to avow himself her lover, or deprive himself of the pleasure of her society. So he had gone on paying her all the attentions of a lover, while leaving it to be implied—in the letter at least—that he was nothing more than a friend; had gone on until Fanny had been led to love him with all the force of her nature, with a love far deeper, far more likely to be the happiness or misery of a life than many a love which found expression in frantic actions or florid language. It is only due to him to say that he did not understand the full extent of her feelings towards him. knew, as he would have said, that she thought a lot of him, and that he could, if he liked, be leading hand with her; but at the same time he



said to himself that if any eligible matrimonially inclined suitor was to come forward he would gracefully retire; and he had an idea that in such a case Fanny would be worldly wise enough to quietly drop him, unless, brought up by the danger of losing her, he declared himself.

Well, she couldn't have been at all a high-spirited girl to so love one who treated her in this cavalier fashion, the reader may say; and again I can only answer, true. She was not high-spirited or strong-minded in this matter; she was only very loving, and trustful, and selfless.

She was still making some fiddling alterations in the arrangement of the tea-things, when the ringing of the workshop bell struck upon her At its first sound she hastily ran upstairs to complete the process known as "tidving herself up," by putting on her cuffs and collar—the latter fastened with a little silver brooch, which was her sole possession in the way of jewelleryand tving a befrilled and bepocketed little apron of the stage-chambermaid pattern in front of her half mourning dress, the skirts of which were looped up over a scarlet petticoat, beneath which her neatly-turned ankles and nattily-booted little feet glittered in and out in a pleasantly tanta-Having finished her toilet by lizing fashion. giving her hair "a brush through," she took a final look at herself in the glass, and was apparently satisfied—as, indeed, she might well

be. Exertion and excitement had given an improving brilliance to her complexion, and an additional brightness to her eye, which, together with her dancing curls, gave a sparklingly piquant expression to her face. She looked her very best; and she would have been no true girl if she had not known that her best was more than commonplace prettiness.

A minute after she got downstairs her brother and Charley came in, the latter observing, by way of salute—

"Well, here we are, missis."

"Very well, master; I'm quite ready for you," she answered, with a smile.

"That's all right, then, my dear," he said, drawing a chair up to the table; and then, as Harry did the same, added, "This is a friend of mine, but I tell him he must make himself at home."

"I hope he will. I'm sure we'll do our best to make him comfortable," answered Fanny, enjoying the joke immensely—for though it was a poor one, you see it was Charley's.

"What have you got there?" asked Harry, nodding towards the herrings, which, covered with a plate, were still on the stand when the first cup of tea was nearly finished.

In her excitement Fanny had forgotten them, and, oppressed by the painful thought that Charley would take note of her negligence, answered confusedly—

- "Oh dear, I hope they aren't spoilt! I've done you a bloater each. I know Charley likes them."
- "Yes—but it's in the morning, though," said Harry.

"" 'We bore him home, and we put him to bed, And we told his wife and his daughter To give him next morning a couple of red-Herrings with soda-water.'

That's Charley's style with bloaters."

Fanny did not quite catch her brother's meaning; and with a half-puzzled, half-distressed look upon her face, exclaimed—

- "Oh, I am sorry! Don't you care about them to tea, Charley?"
- "Well, just hand me the big 'un over here, and then look at me eating it, and you'll see whether I like them to tea or not," he replied, with a smile.
- "Is it cooked to your taste, Charley?" she asked, rather anxiously, when he had eaten a mouthful or two of it.
- "First-rate, Fan," he answered, smacking his lips.
- "Are you quite sure now," she said, still with a shade of doubt in her voice.
- "Of course I am. Harry is chaffing you. Fellows often find a herring very tasty when they've been on the spree overnight, and he wa

to make out that it's only in that way that I care for them."

"Why, Harry, how could you?" she exclaimed, turning upon him in a mildly reproachful way, now that she thoroughly comprehended his meaning. "You know very well Charley never gets tipsy."

"Well, I don't know," said Harry, winking across the table at his friend. "When a fellow is found embracing a gate-post, and saying, 'Don't hit me, mate—I'm only poor Charley Thompson,' it looks suspicious, to say the least of it."

"Well, that is a story," she exclaimed, "whoever said it. If Charley had thought it was a man interfering with him he wouldn't have talked that way—he'd have offered to fight him in a minute."

There was an incongruity about this speech, and in the warmly indignant manner of its delivery, that was exceedingly amusing. Before she had finished speaking her brother had burst into a hearty peal of laughter, and it was with difficulty that Charley refrained from following his example; but noticing the pained look which the outburst brought into Fanny's face, he not only did refrain, but with a very well put-on appearance of being annoyed, observed—

"Well, you may laugh, but she's right. If ever I was to get so far gone as to talk to a post

I'd be more likely to want to fight it than ask it not to hit me."

Not having any conception of the cause of this change in his companion's manner, Harry was rather surprised at it, and astonishment had the effect of bringing his laughter down to a chuckling murmur of, "Well, that was rich!"

He fancied himself at this double-barrelled kind of wit, did Master Harry-thought himself second to none in "chaffing" one person in a way that would "draw on" another. ing the belief that his mother and sister were incapable of appreciating either his powers in this respect or his more oratorical and quotative style of conversation, he never made any display of those accomplishments when alone with them. Before others, however, and especially before Charley Thompson, he delighted to show off in these matters—delighted to show that he deserved the reputation awarded him alike in discussion society, trade union, and workshop circles, of being, whether in serious debate or bantering conversation, a fluent, sarcastic, ready-witted young fellow.

There is chaff and chaff—the chaff of repartee and the chaff that requires a butt—and young Mason's was mostly of the latter type. In his rank of life a wit of his stamp must, unless he is also a bruiser, exercise a certain discretion in selecting his victims: and Harry not being pug-

naciously inclined (in the fistic sense) drew a line at the point at which the slow of comprehension were of a nature likely to resort to punching of heads should they at length discover that they have been used to make sport for ready-witted Below this line he took his butts as Philistines. they came; and his sister being the only one handy on this evening, he played upon her, without any weak-minded considerations as to what her feelings might be occurring to him. He was greatly amused, as we have seen, by his success: which moreover confirmed him in an idea of his to the effect that apart from her work, from her being able to bring in money, and clothe and feed him better than he would do himself, she was a regular little muff. But here again. as is the wont of gentlemen who fancy themselves, he held others too cheaply. He was mistaken generally, and to a certain extent even in the special instance that had given rise to the reflec-Had the chaff come from Charlev she would have understood and enjoyed it-Charley was in the habit of chaffing. But coming from Harry, who, so far as her experience of him went, hardly ever joked, and having a vague notion that there was a breach of hospitality in chaffing a guest, she had been puzzled; and this, combined with the fact of her admiration for Charley, leading her to act impulsively, had caused her to "put her foot in it." Of this Harry's laugh had

suddenly made her aware, and she was very much confused and distressed by the discovery. Charley, she thought, would set her down as a little fool—or worse still, would think, as she was beginning to do herself, that she had been too forward in defending him. That he should entertain any such opinion was, to her thinking, nothing less than a calamity, and she was accordingly very much "put out." Charley's manner, however, somewhat reassured her; and the conversation ceasing at this point for a time, she speedily recovered her equanimity.

"It's rather too late to ask you now, Charley," she said, when she had filled up the third and last cup; "but is your tea sweet enough? If it isn't——"

"I suppose I can stir it till it is?" he interrupted.

"Oh no, Charley," she answered, with an emphasis of look and tone which though probably unconscious was nevertheless very meaning, and said as plainly and reproachfully as words could have done—"Well, Charley, I did think that you would have done me the justice of believing that even if I had a heart capable of giving any one insufficiently sweetened tea I could ne'er have so injured you!"

"Why no, of course not," said Charley, replying to the emphasis rather than her words. "You'd make my cup sweet, wouldn't you, Fan?"

and he went through the pantomime of kissing her.

Before indulging in this movement he had taken a glance at Harry, but he need not have been under any apprehension of that gentleman taking notice of his movements, as during the latter part of the meal he had fallen into a reverie concerning matters interesting to himself.

He was thinking of Queen Kate: was again regretting that the one bashful point in his character had led him to decline being introduced to her on the previous evening, and resolving not only that he would not neglect such another opportunity should it come in the way, but that he would try to make one. Having reached this point in the reflections, it occurred to him that he might perhaps obtain some

When they had drawn back from the table and lit their pipes, with a view, they explained to Fanny, of finishing off with a few digestive whiffs, he commenced operations.

useful information by again sounding Charley.

"How did you enjoy your walk with Queen Kate last night?" he asked in an indifferent kind of a way, as if merely to start a conversation without caring much upon what subject it might turn.

The question took Charley rather aback. The subject was the last he would have chosen to have been brought up there, as he knew it would

be a sore one with Fanny. He had even been planning to avoid the topic, having made up his mind to go out with Harry to speak to him about the pic-nic. Finding himself cornered, however, he answered in the same apparently unconcerned manner in which the question had been put.

"Oh, she was going back to the shop, and so I just turned in and had a chat with Miss French; and, by the way, that reminds me I've put you in for a good thing," and then he told him of the arrangements respecting the pic-nic.

Harry was most agreeably astonished by the intelligence. Here was a thing for which he was prepared to scheme laid at his feet without any effort upon his part. A triumphant "hurrah!" would have been the best expression for the true state of his feelings, but it did not suit him to show his real sentiments, and he coldly answered, "Well, as you've promised for me, I suppose I'd better come?"

"Oh dear, no! Don't put it in that light," sharply answered Charley, who, though he did not know how deeply his companion was interested, could still see that he was finessing, and was, moreover, annoyed at his having started the subject. "I'm only limited to a nice young fellow; I can use my own discretion as to the individual; so if you think you don't answer the description, or don't care about going, say so.

I can find plenty of other fellows glad to get the chance."

"Oh, I should like to go; I've never been to anything of the kind before," said Harry, with a conciliatory smile. "You know I'll be a man at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and it's about time I was getting out in that way as well as others."

"Well, that's just what I thought when I named you," said Charley, "and so then we'll put it down that you'll go?"

"Of course you'll stick up to the Queen, Charley?" said Fanny, who, having washed the tea-things in the back kitchen was now arranging them on the sideboard. There was a hardness in her tone, in which as well as her words Charley easily detected a sneer at Kate and a taunt at himself, but he merely smiled as he answered—

"Well, no, I don't think I shall; there's so much competition to secure Kate at the pic-nics that there's more hard work than pleasure for the fortunate party, unless he happens to be really sweet on her."

"Were you really sweet on her last year, then?"

"Well, I suppose there was a little of that and a great deal of a wish to aggravate Mr. Parker. But he's about as down on me now as he well can be, so this time I'll keep quiet."

"Ay, so you say now, but you'll alter your

tone when you see her in some dashing new dress, for I expect she'll be coming out in new things as usual?"

"Yes, she was saying that the Prima Donna and her are to have rigs-out alike: they always seem to be getting new dresses."

"Ay, flimsy things, at a shilling or eighteenpence a yard."

Though she smiled as she spoke, Charley could perceive the bitterness that underlaid her remarks, and he could not resist the temptation to banter her a little.

"That's what you girls always say to fellows about each other," he observed, in reply to her last remark, "but it's very foolish of you. Where he isn't the unfortunate being that has to pay for it, a man hardly ever knows or cares whether a dress costs eighteenpence or eighteen shillings It's how a woman looks in a dress, not what she pays for it, interests him. For instance, I happen to know that just now you're dressed in your second-best clothes; but for all that, if it was left to me I should speak of them as your best, because I think you look prettier in them than you do in your Sunday ones, which, I suppose, cost more money. And in the same way you must admit that whether Kate's dresses cost little or much, she always looks well in them."

The remarks upon her own dress had rather

pleased her, but what followed instantly piqued her again, and with a defiant toss of the head, she answered—

"Oh, of course, Kate looks better than anybody else in anything; and she says everything, and does everything better than any one else. I don't blame you for thinking there's no one like her, but I do for trying to make out that you don't want to be her young man, when you know very well that you do," and as an appropriate suiting of the action to the word, she concluded with an indignant clatter among the dishes.

"You wouldn't talk that way it you had heard him speaking about her last night," said Harry, smiling.

"What did he say?" she asked, attempting to conceal her eagerness by continuing the petulant tone in which she had last spoken.

In reply he told her the substance of what had passed between Charley and himself. This he did for the purpose of leading Charley on to say something in confirmation of the views he had expressed on the previous evening, as he still had his doubts on the subject, but though he failed in that object, he unconsciously did both Charley and his sister a great service by dissipating the jealous fears of the latter.

Finding that Charley did not care about pursuing the subject, he brought the conversation to an end by knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and observing—

"If you are in no hurry, Charley, I'll wash first; I'm going to the institution to change my book, and have a look at the papers."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry," answered Charley; "indeed I don't think I shall go out to-night."

He might have left out the "think," for the subject of the pic-nic having been forced upon him indoors, he had made up his mind to stay with Fanny till her mother came home.

- "And now, Fan, I'll have a wash," he said, when a quarter of an hour later Harry had gone out.
- "All right, Charley; I'll put the water ready, and the clothes are all aired, and laid out in Harry's room."
- "I hope you haven't been taking any of the five-pound notes out of the pockets?"
 - "I'm afraid it would take two to do that."
- "Well, I expect neither of us are troubled with many of them; but let us keep on never heeding, and perhaps we'll be rich some day, and then——"
 - "And then what, Charley?"
- "And then I suppose we'd be miserable about something else," he answered, as he turned into the back kitchen.

In a few minutes he came back, with face all aglow and hair all ruffled, and striking an attitude, exclaimed, "Mr. Thompson, as Roughhead, the Robber! A penny plain, twopence coloured. Exit!" and as he spoke the last word he darted upstairs.

"Now look here, my lady," he said, throwing his coat and collar on a chair when he returned to the kitchen, "cleaned up," with the exception of putting on those portions of his dress; "you've been getting on to me all the evening, and I'm not going to stand it. You ought to pull yourself down to my weight, by rights; but we wont mind that; so come on, and I'll fight you for it."

He threw himself into a pugilistic attitude as he spoke, and began to dance round her while she doubled up her little fists, and laughingly made a pretence of defending herself and occasionally of making a lunge at him. After a minute or two of this work Charley caught her in his arms, and there was a show of a wrestle which in a few seconds settled down undisguisedly into what it had all along really been—an embrace.

"Thou know'st I would na hurt thee, Fan, doesn't thee now?" he said, in a low, coaxing tone, and speaking as he sometimes did, when excited, in the Lancashire dialect.

"Oh yes, I know that, Charley," she answered, softly, but keeping her face shyly hidden on his breast.

"No, that I wouldn't, lass; not a hair of thy

pretty head," he murmured, as he stroked back her curls and gently raising her head, kissed her.

She gave a little start as he did so, and then he released her, saying in his usual light-hearted way, "Now just fix my collar and necktie, and then I'll keep you company while you get on with your work."

He sat down and she came and put on the collar and tie, Charley managing to get hold of her round the waist again during the operation. and to snatch another kiss at its conclusion. Then Fanny brought out her sewing while Charley drew his chair alongside her, and truth to tell, a great deal more love-making than needlework went on between them. If during the two following hours, Charley did not avow his love in so many words, he did in a great many looks, and not a few actions—and for the time being he truly felt all that he looked and acted. At that moment he was oppressed by no chilling sense of prudence, and would joyfully have thrown all his knocking about schemes to the wind, and have married on the spot could the thing have been done. For these two hours they were both very happy. So happy, that when they were brought back to a sense of common-place life by the arrival of Mrs. Mason, they were inclined to wish that the speakers at the tea-party had been even more long-winded than usual.

CHAPTER VII.

A PLEBEIAN COMING OF AGE.

O those destined to come into broad acres

or realized fortunes on coming of age, the latter is of course an affair to be looked forward to with impatience and welcomed with rejoicings—roasting of fatted oxen and broaching of ale casks. It is generally a noteworthy matter to many besides the individual chiefly interested—to those dependent upon him, and to such of the marriage makers and other social spiders as may have marked him for their own

such of the marriage makers and other social spiders as may have marked him for their own. Nay, if the heir happens to be a marquis who "comes into" three hundred thousand a year, it would appear that his coming of age attains to all the magnitude of a national event; an event which altogether eclipses enormous gooseberries, and compared with which even

"Wilful murder falls very dead,"

and

"Debates in the House are hardly read;"

an event to be recorded, held up to admiration,

philosophized upon and lied about in innumerable newspaper reports, leaders, and canards. Whether such a coming of age is, as many people take for granted, not merely a national event, but also a national blessing for the vouchsafing of which all manner of men fortunate enough to be living in the era of its occurrence should be duly grateful whether this is the case, may of course be disputed. Even its importance, apart from any question of the blessedness of its character, might be questioned by a person of malignant disposition; but upon the whole there can be no doubt that an event of this kind has in some senses a great significance. It serves as a striking and unmistakeable illustration of the fact, that the worship of the golden calf is still a predominating one, and forcibly points the moral that

> "People who stand on legs of gold Are sure to stand well with society."

Yes, among those "born of Fortunatus's kin," the day which marks the attainment of legal manhood is a red-letter one! But with the plebeian million, those for whom a spade in the hand rather than a spoon in the mouth, would be an appropriate symbolical birth-mark, the legal coming of age is for the most part a legal fiction. Almost as great a fiction so far as regards any change in their position or possessions as that most fictional of legal platitudes which asserts

that all men are equal before the law. Many of the million do not know their exact age. labour is the only inheritance, and those born to it enter on possession at ten or eleven years of age. and are often "scratch'n for themselves" a little later, such family documents as certificates of birth are seldom preserved, while personal memory is scarcely reliable in fixing the date of one's birth. Thus it comes that numbers of this class speak of themselves as about so old or young. and in affairs in which a question of age becomes material, add or deduct a year or two to suit the circumstances of the case. Sometimes indeed a vouth of loafing proclivities—who, but that gentility forbids the idea, might be taken if not for an "own brother," at any rate for a poor relation of the young gentleman who repudiates tailors' and jewellers' bills upon the plea of infancy -will assert his legal rights by informing the unnatural parents who want him to work, that they are bound to support him until he is twenty-And with a view to providing against one. being kicked out a day sooner than is nominated in the bond, a person of this happily exceptional stamp will ascertain his precise age. But while with vast numbers of them the day of majority passes unnoticed or unknown, there is one instance, that of a bound apprentice, in which even among the working classes a coming of age is a notable matter.

"I shall be a man at twelve o'clock to-morrow," Harry Mason had said, meaning that at that hour the term of his apprenticeship would expire. For the freedom of his trade being the only possession into which he had to come, it was solely from a trade point of view that he regarded the event of his coming of age as being important or one worthy of celebration.

It was the custom of the shop for an apprentice coming out of his time to give a bit of a "do" to his bench mates and one or two other The "do" usually took the intimate friends. shape of a supper, ranging in extent from a welsh rabbit and a glass of ale, up to an elaborate spread, according to the taste and circumstances of the giver. The doctrine that circumstances alter cases was liberally followed out in this Sometimes the supper would be commuted for glasses round at the public house used by the men, and on one occasion, when the new fledged journeyman had been left an orphan and had been sorely put to it to keep himself for some years of his time, his mates had insisted upon "standing" his do themselves. And though they affected to take little notice of it, and good humouredly attributed it to the after supper punch, they probably did Freddy Tyson the justice of believing that it was the memory of their many acts of kindness towards him, and not the drink, which made him break down when he was returning thanks for the speech in which his leading hand proposed a prosperous career to him, and spoke of him as having been "as good and straightforward a lad as ever lifted a hammer."

Looking at the position of the family, Sandy Grant, Charley Thompson, and one or two others had considerately advised Harry Mason to "draw it mild" over his coming of age festivities, but this advice he had rather scornfully rejected, saying that he didn't see why he should be behind others, and that he would rather not give a spread at all, than that it should be a paltry one. this view he easily got his mother and sister to acquiesce, and a "do" upon an extensive scale had been definitely decided upon weeks before the event. Even the details had been arranged. The party was to consist of Sandy Grant, Charley Thompson, Tom Kenyon—the other journeyman at the bench—and his wife, Georgev Clayton, Harry's oldest fellow apprentice, who would himself be out of his time in another three months. and Mr. and Mrs. Gregson. The hour of assembling was to be eight o'clock. The parlour was to be the reception, and the kitchen the supper room. Cake and spirits were to be offered to the visitors as they arrived, and when all had come, there were to be round games of cards till supper was For though Mrs. Mason, in common with the rest of her connexion, spoke of cards as

the devil's books, she had been brought to consent to their use "for this night only" on Harry's representing that they were necessary to the completeness of the entertainment. The supper, though mentioned last, was anything but the least feature in the programme. It was to include cold boiled beef and roast mutton, with hot vegetables, a plum pudding, and a variety of tarts, with of course bread and cheese to finish. After supper they were to return to the parlour, and punch, health drinking, toast giving, singing, chat—whatever the company willed, was to be the order of the night.

Such was to be the extent and arrangement of the festivities, and early on the important day Mrs. Mason was, as she expressed it, up to the eves in the work of preparation. By twelve o'clock, however, she had got through the rough of it, and was enabled to put on her best clothes to receive Harry, for she was determined that on this day of days everything should be done Harry, following the custom of the in state. shop, dropped work for the day at noon, and she had hardly dressed when he came in. his surprise, for they were not a demonstrative family, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, then with her hands on his shoulders she stood at arms' length, and looking lovingly. into his face said softly, "Harry, my own dear boy, wouldn't poor father have been proud if he

could have lived to see this day?—but you must never forget how good he was to you and to us all."

As she finished speaking she pushed him towards Fanny, and then sat down and burst out crying. Fanny put up her face to be kissed, and so Harry took her round the waist and lightly pressed his lips to hers, then going over to his mother said soothingly, "Don't cry, mother, don't be sad on this day."

"Let me have it out, Harry," she answered sobbing, "it'll do me good; I ain't melancholy, lad, not a bit of it," and presently she wiped her eyes and was soon bustling about again.

Charley Thompson was the first of the party to arrive in the evening. "Well, Harry," he said, shaking hands with him, "I suppose I must congratulate you in form—which I does accordingly." Taking the glass of spirits which Fanny filled out and handed to him, he went on, "I know, Mrs. Mason, that this is a happy day both for you and Fanny, and I hope it is only the first of very many happy days to come; and now, Harry old fellow, here's to you; may you begin well and continue prosperously; may you never want work, or if you should, may you never want a mate to stand by you, or fail to stand by a mate who may need help and deserve it."

"I expect we'll all have to be mighty civil to you now you're a man, or else you'll be wanting to

know our fighting weights, eh, Harry?" resumed Charley, putting down the glass, and at the same time putting off the slightly sententious tone and manner in which he had previously spoken.

"Well, I don't feel very ferocious just yet," answered Harry, readily dropping in with Charley's lighter strain. "I suppose," he added after a brief pause, "old Sandy will be sure to come?"

"You may depend upon that; he doesn't care much about going out, but as he's promised he'll keep his word."

"Oh, I hope he'll come, we would be disappointed if he didn't," said Fanny; and her mother added an emphatic, "We would so."

Sandy's absence from the party would really have been a great disappointment to them. had always been very kind to Harry, and more especially so since the death of his father, and they knew how he had exerted himself on their behalf in their time of trouble. They felt very gratefully disposed towards him and had often wished for an opportunity to thank him, but up to the present time they had never seen him. Harry had often asked him to come and take tea with them on a Sunday, but that sort of thing was out of his way, and he did not accept the invitations. For a time he had even declined to attend the coming of age party, but at length the joint importunities of Harry and Charley had induced him to say he would come. On receiving this intelligence Mrs. Mason had been excited as well as rejoiced. She provided some Scotch whisky for his special drinking, and having heard of haggis as the national dish of Scotland she made inquiries as to its nature, and would certainly have attempted its production had not Harry vetoed it on the ground that "any fuss of that sort would only make old Sandy uncomfortable."

Such being the state of affairs, the mere suggestion that Sandy might not come, after all, was sufficient to alarm the female portion of the Mason household; but their anxiety on this point was of very brief duration, for a minute or two after he had spoken, Harry, who had sauntered to the open door, exclaimed, "Oh, it's all right, here's old Sandy coming up the road."

"Where is he?" asked Fanny, springing up and peeping out under her brother's arm.

"Why there! can't you see?" answered Harry, rather tartly.

"Well, don't be cross with me, Harry," she said, as she came back from the door; "mother wouldn't have thought that was him any more than I did." And she might with equal truth have added, "nor would any one else who had always heard him spoken of as I have."

Among his mates Sandy was called old in much the same way that Fanny was styled little by her friends. On physical grounds there was

even less justification for the title in his case His actual age was about five or than in hers. six and thirty, and having light hair, a clear skin, and florid complexion, he looked younger. But it was in reference to his moral and social characteristics that the name had been bestowed upon him, and in this connexion it had a certain appropriateness. He was the sort of man that his own countrymen would have set down as an "unco douce body." A quiet, thoughtful, reserved kind of man, admitted by those of his class who were personally acquainted with him to be educated far above the average of that class, and known by them to take an earnest and studious interest in the great social and political problems that affected the welfare of the class. One who, while a ready and able speaker on such topics, seldom spoke in a conversational way, though when he did it was with a point and dryness the quality of which made up for lack of quantity, and was the horror of the two or three gentlemen of the Sir Oracle stamp for whose discomfiture it was generally put forth. A man who was sometimes spoken of as "rather odd, you know," by reason of his acting upon principle to what was considered a quixotic extent. A man who on the most trivial matter which involved a principle would express himself to an employer without fear or favour, though he were assured beforehand that loss of work would immediately

follow his speaking. A man who, more than all this, and herein was he considered most daringly eccentric, would—still on principle, for his opposition had rarely any effect save to bring ill-will to himself—beard the lion in his den; would openly place his opinion in opposition to that of the general body of his class on some of the chief points of doctrine preached by professional working men's friends. In short, there was an unmistakeable individuality about him. He stood out from the ruck, and the ruck seeing this, voted him "a rum nut," and christened him "Old Sandy."

But Fanny had no knowledge of all this, and her surprise at finding that the person she had always heard spoken of as old, was so young-looking a man, was therefore natural. She had not looked for anything specially patriarchal, but having often heard her brother speak of what he called "Old Sandy's crotchety obstinacy," she had pictured to herself a wiry, wrinkled, iron-grey man, with a hard manner overlying a really kind heart. But instead of this, here came a robust, youngish looking man, whose face expanded with a genial smile as her brother met him on the threshold, a man with nothing in the least hard, or cynical, or eccentric in his appearance, and so she was very much surprised, and what was more, very much pleased.

The Sandy she had imagined was a being she had determined to make herself like, for sake of

his kindness to the brother she loved so much. The Sandy who came into the house a minute after she had stepped back from the doorway. who grasped Harry's hand so warmly and wished him prosperity with such evident sincerity, who spoke so kindly to her mother, and was so friendly with Charlev—this Sandy was a man whom she felt she could take to spontaneously. Harry went through the ceremony of introducing him to her, the bright smile on her face, the welcoming pressure of her little hand, and the warmth of manner with which she exclaimed "Oh, Mr. Grant, we are so glad to see you here," were no conventionalities—were not, as they might have been towards the man of her preconceived idea, in any degree forced; they were really the outward and visible signs of a pleasure truly felt.

To Fanny, Sandy's coming to their house was a noteworthy event, but that he should regard it in the same light was a thing which had never occurred to her, and yet he did so look upon it. Except to the lodges of his clubs, or for a solitary stroll, he hardly ever went out, and never to social gatherings of this kind. He could be calm and self-possessed when holding his own at a stormy Trade Union meeting; but over going to the Masons' party, he had felt bashful and nervous. He had an idea that in such an assembly he would be uncomfortable, and make others so.

It was upon this ground, though he did not say so, that he had at first refused to come to the party, and when at last he reluctantly consented to attend, the subject had given him a great deal more anxiety than those who knew him would have thought it possible for so slight a matter to do. He too had been drawing fancy portraits of those he was to meet, and Fanny's surprise at seeing him was not greater than his own on beholding her. Without exactly knowing why, without anything being said that would, taken literally, justify such an idea, he had come to the conclusion from the manner in which he had always heard her brother speak of her, that she was a Tilly Slowboy sort of girl, a willing, hard working, affectionate little creature, but plain looking, awkward, and dull. A girl whom a just man was bound to respect for the sterling qualities underlying her unattractive exterior, while regretting that those qualities should, so to speak, be clouded by such an exterior. Of the pretty. vivacious little girl who welcomed him with such unaffected delight, he had never dreamt. He had come looking for the Cinderella of the kitchen, but found instead the lovely little princess, and the spell of her beauty fell suddenly upon him. The touch of her hand thrilled him, her face was as a loadstone to his eyes, and only he was for the time being incapable of reflecting upon any abstract question, he would

have wondered how it was possible for any merely human voice to be so sweet and musical as hers seemed to him.

When, having put his hat away, she came and sat beside him and began to chat about "our Harry," he listened, entranced, to the voice in the pauses of which he murmured inapt and monosyllabic replies. Somehow he didn't feel bashful. and he did feel strangely happy, though "our Harry," who had again gone to the door, or Charley Thompson, with whom Mrs. Mason was holding a whispered consultation on the subject of the supper, would have put it down that the reverse was the case. They would have attributed the flush on his cheek, and a slight restlessness in his manner to his being ill at ease. The idea of "Old Sandy" suffering from love at first sight, would to them have appeared intensely Sandy himself had no distinct conception of such being the case, he yielded himself to, but did not attempt to analyse the novel feeling of happiness that had so tumultuously taken possession of him, while Fanny had not the remotest notion of the influence she was exercising upon him. But though no one perceived it. certain it was that at the end of five minutes Sandy was not the heart-whole man he had been when he entered the house. He was as much in love as any boy could have been in the same time, but with such a love as no

Cold and reserved in outboy could have felt. ward seeming, he was in reality only an habitually self-restrained man. Under his ordinarily grave manner, there was a capability of deep, passionate, and even impulsive feeling. who saw him so steady and self-possessed in the workshop would have been greatly amazed could they have sometimes seen him, when alone in his room he would spring from his seat and pace the apartment like some caged animal, or with a muttered imprecation, bring his clenched fist down on his book or paper as he read of some wrong done, or of misery and suffering brought about by social anomalies for which he found himself impotent to suggest a remedy. now the rock had been struck, struck with the rod of Fanny's pretty beaming face and winning welcoming smile, and all the latent passion of his nature gushed forth in a feeling of love towards her. A feeling not as vet clearly defined, even to his own mind, but which had nevertheless been called into existence and was destined to grow in force, and already affected him so strongly that Fanny's having presently to leave his side to assist in receiving Tom Kenyon and his wife, possibly saved himself and others from some embarrassment.

Mrs. Kenyon was a genuine Lancashire lass. When, five years back, Tom had married her, she was a factory girl in Bolton, and like most others of that class, was then sallow and sickly looking, but a three years' residence in Stonebury had made her plump and blooming and merry. But though she had been better out of it than she had even been in it, she was right loyal to her "home county." The sight of any one belonging to it always warmed her heart, she said, and she generally availed herself of such an opportunity to indulge in a little broad "Lanky" dialect. When therefore her husband and she had expressed the customary good wishes for Harry, she turned smilingly to Charley Thompson and brusquely asked, "Well, oud Manchester, how art?"

"Right pe'ert, bonnie Bouton, an' o' ny Tom's by I'd gie thee a kiss."

"I'd clout thee if thee didst," she answered, promptly.

This reply caused a laugh to which burly Jem Gregson, who with his wife at that instant came in, added his hearty guffaw, though he had but a vague idea of the occasion of the mirth.

"Well, Harry lad, here's to thee wi' a' my heart," he said, taking the glass which Fanny held out for him, when they had done laughing, "I dunnot want to say ou't to damp us at a time ike this, but I could na wish thee a better wish than that thou may'st be as good a mon as thy feayther, and here's to the bottom on that." He tossed off his glass as he finished speaking,

and then Charley, who had been looking out at the window, said, "Here's the bold Anniversary coming up the road, Harry, as large as life, and got up regardless of expense."

"Why, who ever is Anniversary?" asked Mrs. Mason, laughing.

"Georgey Clayton," answered Charley; "whenever he wants to give a do to a lot of us chaps, he persuades his mother that it's the anniversary of something or other, of his having been bound, or her having been married, or anything else he can think of. Last year he had three birthdays."

"Don't tell stories, Charley."

"It's a fact; he's a character is master Georgey, I tell you."

And in a small way Georgey, or, as he was styled among his mates, Anniversary Clayton, really was a character. He was a tall, slimbuilt young fellow, with light curly hair, blue eyes, regular features, and pink and white cheeks, on which, to his chagrin, there was as yet no appearance of "hirsute appendages." He was dressily inclined, and his tastes in this respect were sometimes a little loud, but notwithstanding his foppishness and the somewhat effeminate prettiness of his face, he was a manly young fellow at bottom. He was given to slang, and at present his ambition was, as he would have put it, to "pal in" with Charley Thompson. He knocked

about with Charley in the evenings, and like him was "thick" with Bentley's needle-drivers, and a regular frequenter of Steperson's academy. When he first went to work, his girlish face and the fact of his spending a good deal of the liberal amount of pocket-money with which his mother -a tradesman's widow, who idolized her Georgev -supplied him, in sweetmeats, led to his being nicknamed Mary. This name stuck to him until, for calling it after him in the street, he, to the great astonishment of his mates, challenged out "nailer" Robinson, the acknowledged champion of the apprentices, and to the still greater amazement of all beholders, "polished him off," after half-an-hour's "dingdong" fight-It was of course a self-evident proposition that Mary was no name for a fellow who had "licked" the previously unvanguished nailer. and he went about nicknameless until Charley Thompson christened him Anniversary. Georgey was a self-possessed—some people said a cheeky -young fellow, and now, clad in a fashionably cut suit of light Melton, deer-stalker hat and patent-leather boots, and sporting a large breastpin and conspicuous signet-ring, he sauntered jauntily up the road and entered the house a minute or two after Charley had spoken.

"Of course this is only the regulation sort of thing," he said, when about to drink to Harry, "but I hope, old chum," and the expression of his face grew more soft and girlish as he spoke, "you believe that in your case I really mean all I say, and so here's to you."

"Hadn't you better do the M.C. business for me, Harry?" he went on in an undertone, when he had recovered his breath, for being a very unseasoned vessel, and the occasion not sanctioning sipping or heel-taps, the drink had brought the water into his eyes and made him gasp. "I know who the women are, but I don't know which is which, and I shall be putting my foot in it."

Harry, who had forgotten to do so when he came in, accordingly introduced him, naming Fanny last.

"I think I've had the pleasure of meeting Miss Mason before?" said Georgey, interrogatively.

"I used to be at Bentley's," she answered.

"Oh yes, I remember, but you left soon after I began to be acquainted with the young ladies."

Then they fell to chatting about the needledrivers, and were soon quite merry together, a state of things which rather curiously had the effect of convincing Sandy that never before had he seen Anniversary so offensively foppish. Had he been a petty-minded man, any one noticing the look with which he regarded the unconscious Georgey, would have thought it suggestive of that free and easy young gentleman being put to some especially heavy or dirty work on the following day, but as it happened no one—not even Mrs. Mason, who was engaging him in conversation at the time—did notice it.

- "Oh, I say, Charley, are you going to the picnic to-morrow?" suddenly asked Clayton, as something in his conversation with Fanny brought the subject to his mind.
 - "Yes. Both Harry and I are going."
- "Oh, I see Harry's going to come out and do the fascinating, now he's a man."
- "He'd better watch that the fascinating isn't done upon him," put in old Sandy.
- "He knows his book too well for that," answered Charley.
- "Say you don't know, mate," said Clayton, laughing. "From what I hear about new dresses, and sweet things in bonnets, the needle-drivers are sure to be in killing form to-morrow, and you know they can do it when they like. It's always a case of smite with some one at the pic-nics, and Harry here *might* be the victim this time."
- "Well, less likely things have happened," said Charley, laughing, "but don't let us anticipate evil for all that."
- "No, let's tempt fortune at three-halfpenny loo," said Harry, taking a pack of cards out of a drawer, for though he spoke in the same jesting tone as his companions he was really anxious to change the subject.

"Come on, Fan," said Charley, when some of them had taken their seats round the table; "they wont burn your fingers; never mind what Brother Waggley says."

"But I can't play, Charley."

"You can learn though, so come and sit here between Sandy and me, and we'll show you how to go on."

She looked at her mother, and seeing she made no sign of disapprobation, took her seat as requested, and then the game began.

It was not very strictly played, the card law of silence in particular being placed in abeyance. Mrs. Kenyon and Charley resumed their joking. Fanny consulted him and Sandy on the game when it was her turn to play, and laughed and chatted with them when it was not. Small jokes were fired free, and at every joke, and especially at his own, Jem Gregson came in with his great resounding laugh, which being of the catching order would set the table in a roar.

The supper passed off in the same merry style. Every one praised the cooking, and while doing justice to it, managed to keep up a running conversation, which just as they were finishing culminated in Jem Gregson nearly choking himself laughing at the exquisite joke of his having said when pressing his wife to take cheese, "Oh, let me cut you a little bit, my dear, if it's only a pound or two."

After supper they returned to the parlour, and glasses of punch being mixed, all prepared to honour unitedly the toast they had drunk singly on their arrival. It was proposed by Sandy Grant in a short speech, in which he spoke of Harry as a steady, clever young fellow, likely to get on, and not likely to forget the debt of gratitude he owed to his mother and sister and the memory of his dead father.

Harry replied with—as Charley Thompson afterwards observed—less of quotation and more of feeling than might have been expected.

The remainder of the night was whiled away as pleasantly as the earlier part had been. Mrs. Kenyon sang "Come whoam to thi childer an me." Charley Thompson followed with "Mary of Argyle," and Jem Gregson with "The days when I was hard up." Then Georgey Clayton "did his vocal" in the shape of a popular music-hall song, and Harry recited the "Death of Marmion." About half-past eleven Mrs. Kenyon began to speak of the danger of losing quarters in the morning, and Mrs. Gregson seconding her, the men took the hint. "Auld Lang Syne" was sung standing, and then the company separated.

"Coming up the road a bit, old fellow?" asked Clayton of Charley Thompson when they got outside.

"Yes, I think I'll have a smoke before I go in."

"Come along then, my chickabiddy," said Clayton, whom the little drink he had taken had made talkative and confidential. "Did you take stock of old Sandy?"

" Not particularly."

"Well, I did, mate, and if old Sandy wasn't old Sandy, I'd say he was spoons on your little lady."

"My little lady?"

"Oh, vou needn't do the innocent, Charley; it wont go down with me, you know. Love me, love my brother, eh? Well, I often wondered how you came to be so dreadful thick with Harry; it wants a strong constitution to stand as much of him as you get. He's a nice fellow in a many ways, and deucedly clever with the Mr. Chairman and gentlemen. crags and peaks. Brother members, shall we submit to this monstrous dictation—and all the But still there's just a shade too rest of it. much me and myself about him to altogether suit your book if there wasn't a pull in the background, and now I see where the pull lies."

"Don't you see two moons?"

"Lay not that flattering unction to thy soul, mate. I am not drunk, this is my right hand, this is my left, my blood as temperately as yours doth beat, et cetera, et cetera. I shouldn't deny the pull, I should be proud of it, she's a regular little beauty, and as to being a good girl, Kate

and the rest of them say themselves, there ain't one of them fit to be mentioned on the same day of the week with her, though that's perhaps because they don't go in much for the devoted sister line of business on their own account."

"Well, I expect it is; if you were to say that you thought Fanny better looking than them, or she was to try to cut them out in dress, you'd hear a very different tale about her goodness, but at any rate all this has got nothing to do with old Sandy, and it was him you were beginning to talk about."

"I've said all I had to say about him. If he isn't spooney he ought to be ashamed of himself for looking so like it."

"Oh, your head is always running on love affairs."

"And that's just why I understand them, my boy; I spot them instanter, and you may take my word for it Sandy's is a genuine case. You couldn't see his face at the card table, but I could; I saw how it brightened up when she spoke to him and how his eyes followed her about, and it was the same at supper. Then see how he flushed when he was bidding her good night, and how soon he promised to come down to tea on the Sunday when she asked him. She's settled Sandy, you may depend upon it, though she isn't aware of it, as it's about as plain that she's sweet on you as it is that he's sweet

on her. But you should look out, for all that; these quiet-going middle-aged fellows often carry all before them when they come out in earnest. For one thing, they're generally more settled in life and better off than we young chaps, and girls look at that.—

"My children! great is Fortune's power, And plain this truth appears, That gold thrives more in a single hour Than love in seven long years."

During the conversation—for Charley's occasional interjections saved it from being quite a monologue-Clayton had been indulging in a series of knowing winks and head-shakings, and had spoken in the low tone becoming the friendly counsels of wisdom, but the manner in which he bawled out this snatch of song indicated that he was reaching the boisterous stage of half-vinous Had their discourse turned upon any elevation. other topic than the one it had done, Charley would have been amused by his companion's manner, but now it annoyed him. He had been thinking as he walked along. He had said to himself that Clayton's idea might be correct, and he felt, though he tried to reason otherwise, that if it was, his fine theory about falling quietly into the background if any suitable person were to show themselves desirous of courting Fannywas only a theory. He already felt a strong impulse of rivalry stirring within him-felt that

he neither could or would willingly give her up to another. At the same time he could not bring himself to resolve to definitely declare himself her lover with a view to an early marriage. He knew, on the other hand, that if he entered into a long engagement and then did not keep it, he would be justly regarded as a scoundrel by all whose good opinion he most cared for; and he was sufficiently aware of his own weakness to feel that there would be considerable danger of his breaking any such engagement when he was once away from her; while the idea of abandoning his long-cherished plan of knocking about, seeing the world for a few years as a free man, was utterly distasteful to him. he had worked himself into a dog-in-the-mangerish mood, and was dissatisfied with himself and every one else, especially Georgey Clayton, whose break-out of song raised his irritation to the explosive point.

"Look here, Georgey," he said, turning abruptly upon him; "this talk's all very well to me, but it mustn't go into the shop or among the needle-drivers—you understand."

"Quite," he answered, taking his arm out of Charley's; "but if I didn't, I wouldn't be made to see it in that way. I'm not to be bounced out of a thing even by you, Charley."

Now Charley knew very well that though Clayton was very open with his friends, he was no tattler, and the change in the latter's manner instantly brought him to a sense of his petulance and injustice in speaking as he had done, and he unhesitatingly made the *amende*.

"Well, don't be huffed with me, Georgey, that's a good fellow," he said. "I'm sorry I spoke that way, I didn't really mean it, you know. I suppose the little drink we've had has made you merry, while it's put me out of sorts."

"Well, we'll put it that way," answered Georgey, laughing; "we wont say anything about the green-eved monster."

"Agreed, then we wont, and now as my pipe's out, I'll go back."

"All right; I'll call for you in the morning, then," he answered. "But seriously, Charley, I think I'm right about old Sandy."

As has been seen, he was right.

On leaving the party, Sandy was already enduring the joys and miseries of love sickness. He thought of Fanny's pretty animated face, and her kind confiding manner towards himself, and felt happy; thought of the expression he had once or twice noticed on her countenance when she looked up into Charley Thompson's, and felt miserable. Then he fell to wondering how Charley was really affected towards her, or whether there might not even be a positive engagement between them of which he had not heard. He had seen that Charley was quite at home in the house,

and seemed to be regarded as one of the family. and as these matters passed through his mind, he still felt unhappy. But presently his spirits rose joyously again, as, after a rapid putting together of ifs and mights, his imagination conjured up a possible picture of a cosy little household of his own, with Fanny as its goddess. picture which was all the pleasanter to contemplate, when by way of contrast he thought of his present landlady. Mrs. Hanks, the landlady in question, was, he acknowledged, a clean, industrious, honest old woman, a good enough woman in her way, and one whom it had never before occurred to him to think of with the slightest disparagement, but she was heavy and stolid, and had such a tongue. She "blethered." and was constantly "deaving him with her auld wife's clavers." She took in the Illustrated Police News, and when she had supped full of its horrors, would insist upon retailing them to Being fully persuaded that the so-called likenesses in it were life-like portraits, she would comment upon them, saving that one had a hanging look, that villain was written on the face of another, or that she could see murder or burglary peeping out of the corner of the eye of Nor was she at all disconcerted, or her belief in her own powers as a physiognomist in the least shaken, when it was sometimes pointed out to her that she had taken the victim of a

murder to be the perpetrator of it. Her addiction to the literature of crime was not her only She was an inveterate gossip, weakness either. nay there were other gossips who, when they had quarrelled with her, did not hesitate to say that she was a backbiter and scandal-monger, and it must be admitted that she sometimes professed to see "bad 'un" written on the faces or deceit peeping out of the eves of her friends in much the same fashion that she discovered still worse traits in the portraits in her favourite paper. As a natural consequence of her tattling proclivities. she was frequently under the necessity of "facing out" some matter of gossip, of justifying herself for saying, or disproving having said, this or that evil thing of her neighbours, of showing cause why the said neighbours should not "have the law on her," and upon more than one of these occasions she had, to his great horror, called upon "my lodger" to appear before the conclave of gossips in order to corroborate some statement of Still she was sober, and didn't toll his eatables, or pawn his clothes, or tamper with his letters—was upon the whole, as landladies go, a very good one, and such had hitherto been Sandy's opinion respecting her. But now her shortcomings suddenly rose up in judgment against her, and made her appear an utterly unbearable Such thoughts were scarcely in keeping with Sandy's usual sense of justice, but then he

was in a very unusual frame of mind, and perhaps his severe reflections upon his landlady's failings were after all only an artistic necessity. Even pictures of the imagination are the better for a background, for a shade which throws their lights into stronger relief, and Mrs. Hanks and her objectionable ways made up a background, that by force of contrast greatly enhanced the beauty of Sandy's warmly coloured picture of a bright little home and wife of his own.

Now, too, for the first time, he experienced a sense of loneliness. In the workshop and at his clubs he had as much of the society of his fellow men as he cared about, and a quiet evening in his own room with some interesting book had hitherto seemed to him the pleasantest of all companionships. But now that picture of an evening at home altogether paled before the one in which Fanny Mason was the principal figure.

Thinking of these things, feeling at one moment happier and the next more miserable than he had ever done before, Sandy reached his lodgings and went to bed. The same thoughts and fluctuations of mood followed him into the land of dreams, and when at half-past five Mrs. Hanks' call roused him from a restless sleep, his first waking thought was again of Fanny Mason's pretty face and winning ways. Altogether there was no doubt of old Sandy Grant being in love, but so far as he knew, the love was as yet all

upon his side. He was tormented by doubts of his ever being able to make it reciprocal; was haunted by the indescribable something telling of love which he had noticed in Fanny's manner towards Charley Thompson; and his love running thus brokenly, caused him as much of misery as of joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARING TO DO THE GRAND.



OW, Charley, my man, turn out!" shouted Mrs. Johnson as she knocked at Thompson's bedroom door on the

morning after the coming-of-age party. "Here's your friend Mr. Clayton waiting for you."

"Well, tell him I'll be down in a couple of minutes," he replied as he jumped out of bed, and his answer was no mere figure of speech, for at the end of the time named he was downstairs.

"Well, you're a nice cup of tea! lying skulking in bed till this time in the morning," said Clayton as soon as Charley got into the kitchen.

"Now, look here, missis," said Charley, turning to his landlady, "I don't want to be a party to a deception. To hear this fellow speak you'd think he was a model early bird, while the fact is he loses more morning quarters than any one else in the shop."

"But then there's a great difference between getting up to go to work and getting up to go to pleasuring," said Georgey. "On working morn-11

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ings, I must confess, that bed pulls very hard with me, and then, you see, I've no loving wife to kick me out."

"Ah, you may laugh, Mr. Clayton," said Mrs. Johnson, "but wives have to think of them sort of things; they have to lay the money out if the men have to earn it; and 'losing quarters will never buy the child a frock,' as the sayin' is."

"That's the women's delicate way of putting it," said Charley, "but what they mean is, that it'll never get the wife a new dress. However," he concluded, turning to Clayton, "it isn't the missis' fault that I wasn't up earlier; I left no word about being called."

"I was wiser in my generation, and did. When I got home I did a little of the Queen-of-May business. I rapped at the old lady's door, and says—'Wake me up early, mother dear, for to-morrow is the picnic day, which comes but once a year.' Like you, she was unkind enough to attribute my flow of soul to drink, until I assured her that it was only a case of needle-drivers' picnic on the brain."

"Boil me a couple of eggs while I'm washing, will you, missis?" said Charley: "I'm going to live high to-day. Do you like eggs, Georgey?"

"Yes, but I've had breakfast."

"Oh, you needn't have alarmed yourself; I was only going to say that if you did you could look at me eating them."

"Well, as there's no extra charge at feedingtime, I will."

While chatting, Charley had also been thinking; and his morning thoughts, like Sandy Grant's, were of little Fanny Mason. Not his first thoughts exactly, for those, as is usually the case with people going picnicing, were of the weather, in relation to the party and the clothes to be worn at it.

But these matters occupied him only for a moment. A glance through the window showed him the morning was beautifully fine, and with a self-satisfied "that's all right," he dismissed for the time being those weather anxieties which are by no means the least of the smaller miseries of an Englishman's life.

On coming back from washing and sitting down to breakfast his thoughts reverted to Fanny, and for the first time his thinking of her brought him a sense of vexation as well as of pleasure—of vexation with himself, and old Sandy and Georgey Clayton, but not with her. Now that the idea of another man seeking her love was definitely before him, she seemed a nobler, prettier, more loveable little girl than she had ever done before.

On this ground—on the ground that he had not hitherto appreciated her many good qualities or understood the strength of his own feelings towards her—he excused himself to himself for abandoning his fine notion of retiring from the field should any more decided lover appear on it. He had told Kate Fairfield that one of the things which he did not know was whether or not he was in love with Fanny, but the thoughts suggested by what Clayton had said had greatly sharpened his perception on the point.

The fact was, conscience was making a coward of Charley. In his heart of hearts he knew he was not acting in a manly way towards Fanny, though he could not bring himself to acknowledge even mentally that such was the case.

More because his mind was running on the subject than from having any special design in view, he turned to Clayton, and asked—

"Do you really think there's anything in what you were saying about old Sandy last night?"

"I feel sure there is. I don't pretend to be further seeing than other people, but I happened to take notice of Sandy last night, and judging by my own style of performance when I am suddenly struck spooney, I've no doubt he has tumbled into love with Fanny, and a thing of that sort is more likely than not to be serious with a fellow like him. Then as I saw how she was held towards you, and had a pretty good notion of how you were held towards her, I thought I'd be doing a service to all parties by

speaking, and I believe so still, for I've been thinking about it since."

- "A penny for your thoughts, then."
- "You shall have them for nothing, and I'll give you the real straight tip, if you wont be offended."
 - "Go ahead!"
- "Well, I will, for it's only what I think, after all. Of course, I know from what you've said in advising me that you don't want to commit matrimony, or get yourself tied by any promise in that line for some years to come. At the same time I think you're in love with Harry's sister, but selfishly so. You would like to have her, but only when you choose to ask for her, and without pledging yourself in the meantime."
- "Well, between you and me, Georgey, I begin to think that that's about the correct state of the poll."
- "I thought so; and as she's sweet on you, things might have been brought off as you wanted them if no one else was after her."
- "But if old Sandy comes courting her, it'll be a different affair, eh?"
- "Yes; it would likely be a case of speak or die with you then. There's no harm in saying that he's a better man than you in many respects, and he would be a good match for her. Everybody, too, would tell her that she would be a fool to miss him, even if she didn't happen to be par-

ticularly in love with him. Then, though I can hardly believe in it, perhaps there is such a thing as a good sort of a fellow like Sandy making a girl love him."

"Well, I know Sandy is a better man than I am; but, speaking in confidence, Georgey, and without wishing to brag, I don't think Sandy or any one else could cut me out with Fanny."

"Not if you'd speak out; but if you wont speak you're working with a break on while another will be running free, and will have all the more chance if she thinks the fellow she cared for most has behaved badly to her."

"Well, Georgey, people say when a man weds his sorrows begin, but I think they ought to put it further back, and say falling in love is the beginning of sorrow. However, I've only to speak to make myself safe even as you reckon the matter up, and of course you may be mistaken about Sandy altogether. At any rate, I've no need to trouble myself particularly just now, and if the need comes later, why then it will be time enough to see about it."

He got up from the table as he spoke, and his landlady—who on seeing him fairly settled to his breakfast had gone gone upstairs to make the beds—hearing him rising, called out, "I'm to put your best things out, I suppose, Charley?"

"Of course," he answered as he went upstairs; "the needle-drivers would never forgive me if I



went in any others—that's if they would let me go at all in anything less than best."

"Holloa! young man; another new rig-out. You're coming out strong in that line this year!" exclaimed Georgey Clayton, when in about ten minutes Charley came downstairs again.

The rig-out which drew forth this remark consisted of a black cut-away coat with waistcoat to match, light brown tight-fitting trousers, fancy balmoral boots, and a black felt hat, in the band of which on this morning he wore a bright little feather.

These clothes served to set off his shapely figure, while the habitually pleasant expression of his face was heightened by the freshness and rosiness consequent upon a cold dip and a good towelling. So that there was really some excuse for the vein of real self-satisfaction which mingled with his burlesque manner, as, touching himself on the breast, he replied to Clayton, by exclaiming—

"Adorned for conquest! This style complete, five guineas."

"Well, let's hope the unfortunate tailor wont have to be satisfied with fivepence in the pound!"

"They're paid for already, my boy, out of my last piece-work money; but if they weren't, there's no such luck for the likes of us as getting out of our debts by paying a few pence in the pound.

There's no Bankruptcy Court for working men. If a fellow has a thousand a year he can live up to twice as much more, then turn bankrupt, and plead insufficiency of income, get whitewashed. snap his fingers at the tradesmen he has done. and go in for bilking more. But if some poor devil of a labourer, who has to keep a family on eighteen shillings a week, gets into debt for the necessaries of life when he's out of employment, he is hunted up for it directly he gets in work There's no whitewashing for him! hampered for life: he can never leave the tallymen and the hucksters, and the professional small-debt collectors never leave him. I don't go in much for my down-trodden-brethren sort of thing, as you know, Georgev; but if there isn't one law for the rich and another for the poor. there's a rich and poor style of administering the same law."

"I look upon this picture and on that," answered Clayton, who was more amused than impressed by the warmth with which Charley had spoken; "and I quite agree with what has fallen from you, my right honourable friend, but at the same time if you're going to be parliamentary when you're going to a picnic, we'll have to put a muzzle on you."

"Well, I suppose such talk is hardly small enough for a picnic, and so I'll drop it, especially as if I didn't it would be all the same as far as any chance of mending the matter is concerned. And now let us go on into Mason's."

When they went in Harry was still upstairs dressing, and Mrs. Mason busy "siding up" the parlour, which had been disarranged by the birthday party. Thus it happened that Fanny, who had come down from her work-room to iron the seams of a cloak she was finishing, was in the kitchen by herself, and the sight of her pretty face, as she raised her head on hearing footsteps coming up the garden, quite dispelled any slight shade of vexation that was still lingering in Charley's mind.

"Hard at work already, Fan?" he said when she had bidden them good morning.

"Already!" she echoed, looking up at the clock, which just then marked half-past nine. "Why, I've been at it these three hours and more. Saturday's my busy day; everybody wants their new things for Sunday."

"And as a chapel-going young person, you think it your duty to accommodate them on that point, eh?" he said.

"What's chapel-going got to do with it?" she asked, looking up.

"Nay, it's what's that got to do with chapelgoing, you should say, and to that I answer a good deal. There's a very direct connexion between new finery and the attendance at places of worship. You know very well, Fan, that when a woman once gets it into her head that her best bonnet isn't fit to be seen, it's all up with her going to church or chapel till she gets a new one."

"No; not quite, Fan. Many of them go to church just from habit, or because it's considered respectable; but it's not so much a matter of dress with them as with the women, unless in the case of a swell mobsman going to a fashionable church to push trade. He must dress well to get a good place; for whatever others may do, pew-openers worship appearances. But with women, dress is usually the main consideration in the question of church-going."

"Well, yes," put in Clayton. "I expect if there was a law forbidding women to go to church, unless they were dressed in sackcloth, we'd very rarely see one going, eh, Charley?"

"Well, I don't exactly go with you, there, Georgey. I do the dear creatures more justice. That might keep them away for a week or two, but they'd soon make it fashionable. Want of richness in material would be made up for by something striking in the way of cut. They'd adopt a sister-of-mercy style, and vary it every two or three months by inventing new or reviving old costumes—the Jane Shore, say, or the Saint this or that. And then as now, it would only be when they couldn't be in the fashion

that they wouldn't go to church. However, we'll say no more about that. Just take a proper glance at us two beauties, Fan. Do we look very killing this morning?"

- "Oh, very," she said, laughing.
- "I thought we did," he went on in the same light strain; "but as Georgey here says, it's not our good looks, it's our fascinating manner that does it. By the way, what do you think of Georgey? I've had the finishing of him. Do you think he'll be a credit to me?"
- "I hope he will, and to himself and his friends as well."
- "Well, all joking apart, Miss Mason, I can honestly say that if I'm not, it wont be from any fault of Charley's teaching: he always advises me well."

Fanny, without making any reply, bent down over her work again; and taking advantage of the circumstance, Georgey whispered to Charley, "I thought I'd put a good word in for you, old fellow."

"Don't pitch it in too strong, though," Charley whispered back; and then fixing his eyes on Fanny's face, and speaking aloud, he asked—

"And what do you think of old Sandy, Fan?"

In an instant her manner became more animated, and raising her head she answered, in a quick, eager tone, "Oh, he is a nice man. I've

quite took to him, and feel as if I had known him ever so long. But I'm sure I can't make out why you should all call him old. I wish you wouldn't, for I must tell you that I don't think it looks well of you."

"Well, we'll call him 'young Sandy' if you wish it; only don't get excited about it, or you'll make people think you are setting your cap at him."

"There now, Charley, it's no use trying to speak seriously to you; you're on with your non-sense again," she said, with an impatient shake of the head.

Charley was about to make some reply, when her brother shouted downstairs, "I say, Fan, I've broke my collar-button; come and put another on." When in obedience to this call she had gone upstairs, Charley, turning to Clayton, observed, in an undertone, "Well, if Sandy is in love with her, Georgey, it's so much the worse for him, I think. It's very evident that no idea of love between them has ever entered her head, or she wouldn't have spoken so enthusiastically about him, and to me."

- "She's not playing him off against you, of course?"
 - "No! there's nothing tricky about Fan."
- "Well, don't be savage. I don't think she is, and in that case I quite agree with you. Where a girl can be so friendly about a fellow

without even the possibility of love occurring to her, I fancy there's a something dead against the stronger feeling ever existing on her side."

"So I fancy, Georgey. When a girl has once come to look upon a man as a familiar friend and nothing more, it's long odds against her ever being brought to regard him in any other way. There's a spice of the sisterly or daughterly gets into her feelings, and then the mere notion of anything warmer than friendship in that particular quarter comes with a shock."

"And I suppose you think that as Fanny is taking the familiar-friend line towards old Sandy, you needn't care much whether I was right about him or not?"

"Well, yes, that's about the size of it, Georgey." And with this selfishly satisfactory conclusion he dismissed the subject from his mind.

He had scarcely finished speaking when Fanny and her brother came down, and Mrs. Mason hearing Harry's voice, as he bid his friends good morning, came out of the parlour, clothes-brush in hand, and commenced brushing him down. There was not the least necessity for her doing so, and there was equally little need for Fanny at the same time commencing to make some slight alterations in the adjustment of his necktie. But they found a pleasure in believing that they gave the finishing touches to his toilette, while

he had become habituated to and now rather looked for than objected to such attentions.

Like his companions, Harry had dressed in his best: but his ideas of best differed materially They all three belonged to the from theirs. dressy section of the single young fellows of the artisan class; but while Charley and Clayton aimed at a free and easy sporting cut in their after-work dress, Harry adopted what they would have called a more heavy-swellish, and he, and perhaps most other people, a more gentlemanly style. His best suit, like theirs, consisted of a black coat and waistcoat and light trousers, but there the resemblance ceased. Their coats were of the cut-away order, with short tails and broadly flapped pockets, and their waistcoats were so made as, with the aid of a broad scarf, to conceal the fronts of their woollen shirts. Harry's coat was a fashionable modification of the "frock," buttoning tightly at the waist, and then lying open in a line with his low-cut double-breasted waistcoat, so as to show his "worked" shirt front. His hat was a glossy "top," one of a popular pattern; he wore light kid gloves. and carried a silk-tasselled, german silver mounted walking cane; but perhaps the most striking difference—though a small one in itself—between his dress and that of his friends was in his wearing stand-up collars. He went in for the solemn type of swellishness, and in that line it

will be found that nothing—especially in the case of a young man—is more effective than stand-up collars. As he was a tall, slim-built young fellow, his style of dress became him, and he was quite at ease in it. Nor was his face of that vacuous type with which "good figures" are so often crowned. He had regular, clearly cut features, a complexion sallow, but with the sallowness that indicates rather toughness than ill health, while the general expression of his face, and more especially of his fine dark eyes, was highly intelligent.

Any one practically acquainted with the social habits and divisions of the working classes would probably have been able to tell at a glance that Charley Thompson and Georgey Clayton were simply working mechanics cleaned up; but they would have been much more likely to have taken Harry Mason to be, at the very least, a swell clerk, than what he really was. He was in a remarkable degree a gentlemanly looking young fellow, and he knew it, and his mother knew it, and his sister knew it, and they were all proud of it in their respective ways.

When she had "fixed" her son to her satisfaction, and expressed a hope that the party would prove a pleasant one, Mrs. Mason returned to the parlour, and then Harry and his friends set out. Charley, however, managed to linger a little while behind the others, and as soon as they were out of hearing, observed, in a lackadaisical tone, "I wish you were coming, Fan."

"You'll have enough to do to look after Kate," she answered.

"Well, Kate's a very good girl in her way, Fan, but she's not you," he said, going over and playing with her curls, as she stooped over her work.

"No, of course she's not me," she said,

laughing and blushing.

"Now, you know what I mean, Fan," he said, slipping his arm round her neck and gently raising her head; "and I do wish you were coming; but I suppose it's too late for that now, and I'd better be off; so good morning," and suiting his action to give colour to the pretence that he surprised her out of the kiss he took, he ran after his companions.

Though close mates in the workshop, Clayton and Harry Mason saw very little of each other out of it. Their ways were different; and it so happened that Georgey had not seen Harry dressed in his best for a long time. On the last occasion on which he had seen him so dressed, Harry's best had consisted of a suit that he had to a great extent grown out of; and being short in the sleeves and legs, and generally too tight, it had given him a somewhat hobble-de-hoyish appearance. Remembering this, and knowing that Harry was not in the habit of going out much,

Georgev had fully expected to find him less prethan Charley and himself — had indeed been rather hugging himself in that He knew that from their having gone to belief. the trade about the same time, and worked at the same bench, comparisons had been drawn between them, and that Harry was generally allowed to be much the cleverer fellow. To a certain extent he admitted it himself, and made no objection to the rather patronizing manner in which -unconsciously, perhaps-Harry often treated But while walking to Charley's lodgings that morning he had thought to himself—

"It will be my turn to take the lead and do the patronizing to-day. Master Harry will see that I'm as far ahead of him in some accomplishments as he is of me in others. Spouting, and politics, and movements, and all the rest of it, are very well for my 'fellow working-men,' but they don't go down with girls."

He had quite made up his mind to take Harry under his wing—to exert himself even to the extent of sacrificing his own pleasure, to place him at his ease, and prevent him from feeling too keenly his inferiority in point of appearance and manner to Charley and himself. Entertaining these ideas, his surprise at Harry's stylish dress and easy comportment was at first of a not altogether agreeable character. But he was too good humoured a fellow for this feeling to be VOL. 1.

more than momentary with him. Presently there came a revulsion in favour of Harry, whom he began to regard with unmixed admiration as a sort of Admirable Crichton—a fellow who, as he put it, was "clever all round." At last, when Charley overtook them, his enthusiasm found vent in words.

"I say, Charley," he exclaimed, when the latter had joined them, "I can't help admiring Harry here: he's going to give them the regular west-end touch, and no mistake. He may sing, 'I am the man for the ladies,' now he has come out. It'll be all over with you and me when he puts his oar in."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Georgey," said Harry, "you've much more reason to fear that I shall bring discredit on you by being gawky. At any rate, I wish that just for this morning I had a little of the confidence that you seem to have in my lady-killing qualifications."

"I wish you had," said Charley, "for you've been as mum as a mouse all morning, and looking more like a fellow going to his own wedding or to be hanged than one who is going to be introduced to a set of pretty girls."

"Oh, no, not so bad as that, Charley, I hope. You must remember that I'm quite a stranger to this kind of thing, and I was just thinking what I should do and say."

"Do the grand, mate," put in Clayton. "You

look it, and the rest is easy. You'll see how Charley and I will put it on. And as to saying, it's not so much what you'll say as how you'll say it, that you must look to. Say plenty, and give it them in the Young-Ladies'-Journal fashion, and you wont be far out."

"I'm not so sure about our high-born-hero style going down so well as you think, Georgey," said Charley. "It's only on paper that the girls like to have the long words piled up: they know them by sight much better than by sound. Use plain words, Harry; but mince them nicely. Give them the bit-ah-be-ah style: that's what they like."

"So much for the ladies," said Harry, smiling; "and now how am I to act towards the males? Isn't there a sort of Capulet and Montague feeling between the shopman faction and our set?"

"In a general way there is, but we always bury the hatchet on picnic Saturday."

"And smoke the cigar of peace, at seven for a shilling," put in Clayton.

"Ay," said Charley, "but you must say they cost sixpence each."

"That's part of the art of doing the grand, I suppose?" said Harry, smiling.

"Well, it illustrates the principle of the art," answered Charley.

"But, to come back to the shopmen?" said Harry.

"Oh, they're all right. How you get on with them is quite a matter of personal feeling. For my own part, I don't believe in the extreme doctrine that a counter-jumper is only half a man except when he has been made ferocious by having butcher's meat."

"I do then," said Clayton. "I could have sympathized with the unfortunate Frenchman who charcoaled himself to death, and left as explanation and epitaph a paper on which was written 'Born a man, died a grocer.'"

"Died of vanity, is the verdict I would have returned upon that animal," said Charley; "but, at any rate, the girls fancy the counterman, and if we don't want to be cut out, we'd better prepare to do the fascinating, for here we are." And as he spoke they turned through the gateway of the livery establishment from which the party was to start.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEEDLE-DRIVERS' PICNIC.



OST of those who were to form the party had already arrived, and, in knots of two or three, were sauntering up and

down the flagged side walk of the yard.

The men, being mostly Bentley's shopmen, were, it need hardly be said, gorgeously attired. All the colours of the rainbow and a good many more were to be seen in their scarves; they had brilliant flowers in their button-holes, and some of them wore veils round their hats.

The girls were also very gaily, and some of them indeed strikingly dressed; but even here, where dressiness was the rule, the Dauntless Three, who were jauntily walking about by themselves, stood out exceptionally great. They were dressed—costumed would perhaps be the better word—alike, in sailor hats, with long blue streamers, blue open-breasted sailor jackets, "turned up" with black silk, the better to display their little shirt fronts, turned-down collars, and narrow blue neck ribbons; dresses of the same material

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as the jackets, worn a little shorter in the skirt than their scarlet petticoats, which in their turn were barely long enough to reach the tops of their high-ankled, well-fitting, silk-tasselled boots. They knew that their dress was a rather remarkable one, but up to the moment of the arrival of Charley Thompson and his friends it had hardly elicited the amount of surprise and admiration they considered due to it. The other girls, seeing that any open remarks upon it would have gratified them, affected to take no notice of it, and the men of Bentley's aimed at a Sir Charles Coldstreamish manner.

But the railway set were of a more rollicking disposition; and as soon as Charley and his friends came in sight, Tilly Smith smilingly observed to her companions, "Here come the Lancashire Lad and Georgey Clayton: now we shall catch it."

Her anticipations that the attention of the railway set would be demonstrative were speedily realized. The instant Clayton set eyes upon the three he ran up to them, and clapping his hands on his knees, and looking up after the manner of stage sailors when they are supposed to be surprised, exclaimed, by way of a salute, "Shiver me old timbers, shipmates! give us a grip of your fins."

While he was shaking hands with them his companions came up, and Charley having intro-

duced Harry, stepped back a few paces, and assuming a mock critical air began to examine the appearance of the girls.

- "Will we do?" asked Tilly, after a brief pause.
- "Yes, you'll do," he answered, speaking in a slow deliberative way. "The dress is a very pretty one as it stands, still you might have gone all the way."
 - "How all the way?"
- "Why, have put on the breeches, and done the dashing young middy or the handsome cabinboy."
- "Oh, come now, Charley, you mustn't say it's mannish."
- "I don't. I only say it's rather too half-andhalf-ish; but still it puts all the other dresses quite out of court; and though it is a little stagey, you look dreadfully fascinating in it."
- "Yes," put in Clayton, "and it's very much on the cards that we three will make violent love to you three, even if we *should* be accursed of the counter-skippers for doing it."
 - "Kate is late, as usual," observed Charley.
- "Of course," said Tilly, "she couldn't think of coming till she thought every one was here to look at her."
- "Well, as every one wants to look at her, that shows her kindness of disposition."
 - "Her vanity, you mean."

"Oh, I didn't know that girls were afflicted with that weakness."

At this moment a slight buzz among those nearer to the entrance caused Charley and his friends to turn round just in time to see Kate coming through the gateway. The buzz was one of admiration, and was not unworthily be-She wore a little gauzy bonnet, the bridle of which, composed of white satin ribbon and light flowers, threw a softening shade on her face, as it came down on to the breast of her light muslin jacket. Her dress, also of light muslin, was worn with ample skirts, the management of skirts being one of Kate's strong points. On this occasion she so carried them that they billowed about her in an artistically graceful manner, and altogether the lightness in material and colour of her dress, aided by the brightness of the day and her natural advantages, gave a striking freshness and beauty to her appearance.

Harry Mason, at any rate, looked upon her as a vision of bliss, when, having spoken to a number of others, she came smilingly up to the group with which he was standing. She was accompanied by the Mr. Parker of whose marked attentions to her Charley had spoken on the night he had accompanied her to the workshop. The gentleman in question had come to Stonebury from Bentley's London establishment, and was allowed to be the most swellish, and believed

himself to be the most knowing and irresistible of all the shopmen. As his attentions gratified her, Kate at first received them very favourably, but of late he had begun to assume a proprietor-like air towards her, and this she resented. It was probably this feeling of opposition that now led her to come to a stand, instead of just speaking and passing on, as she had done in the case of the other groups, for she knew that Mr. Parker detested the railway set generally, and Charley Thompson in particular. When she shook hands with Charley there was an undisguised warmth in her manner which caused Mr. Parker—who, though standing aloof, was watching her closely—to bite his lips viciously.

"Oh, Kate, I'm beginning to feel very bad again," Charley managed to whisper while he held her hand; then, turning to Harry, he added aloud, "This is Fanny's brother."

Harry had got through the introduction to the Dauntless Three very well, but now, when he ardently wished to show to advantage, he experienced an overpowering sense of bashfulness. He bungled and blushed to a painful degree, failed to notice Kate's offered hand, and broke down at the commencement of an elaborate reply to her simple "How d'ye do?" He was keenly alive to his failure, and inwardly cursed his want of assurance in this respect, as he thought that Kate would naturally set him

down as a booby. But Kate was too well versed in these matters to make any such mistake. She took his confusion as a sincere compliment to the power of her beauty, and thought more highly of him than she would have done had he gone through the introduction with the ease and polish of a Chesterfield.

The brakes being brought round at this juncture, Harry was for the present relieved from further embarrassment. All the group of which he was one got into the same vehicle, and seeing this, Mr. Parker went off in high dudgeon to the other.

The Beacon was ten miles from Stonebury, and the drive out was a very pleasant affair. The brakes were each drawn by four handsome greys in showy plated harness, and as it was market day the turn out elicited a gratifying amount of observation as it drove through the The country roads along which passed were in pretty good going order, and lay through prettily varied scenery. The party was thoroughly imbued with the holiday and lightened the road by laughing. ting, and flirting. Miss French, in the same brake as Charley Thompson, joined with him in so managing the conversation among their set, that Harry Mason was enabled to take part in it. In this way he was soon put more at his ease, and by the time they had reached the foot of the hill all were in high spirits.

The people of Stoneyshire were very proud of the Beacon, and in this instance their pride was perfectly justifiable. The Beacon was a hill to be proud of. It was famous not only in Stoneyshire, but throughout the kingdom, was a favourite resort of sightseers and artists from a distance, as well as of pleasure parties from neighbouring towns. It was well wooded, and, rising over twelve hundred feet, commanded an extensive view of some of the finest landscape scenery in England.

The Bentley party had been systematically arranged: a couple of men had been sent in advance with the provisions, and were now, according to orders, waiting on a lower plateau of the hill with a hamper of liquid refreshments, in the shape of lemonade and bottled stout. Up to this first table-land the company kept pretty well together, but when they had drunk and settled upon two o'clock as the hour at which dinner was to be eaten under a certain clump of trees on the top of the hill, they began to break up into two's and three's, and scramble up in whatever manner and direction they thought proper.

The Dauntless Three, of course, declined to receive any assistance from their male friends; but the other girls, not having to maintain such a character for dash, did not care about

climbing alone. There was naturally a little manœuvering among the gentlemen to secure certain of the girls, and as soon as they began to pair off, Clayton, who was a special admirer of the Prima Donna, whispered to Charley, "I say, let us stick to Nellie and Kate."

Now Charley had been thinking of this matter. and had come to the conclusion that on this occasion he would not "go in for doing the attentive to Kate." He had been making a virtue of necessity by trying to persuade himself that he had come to this decision on high moral grounds. He strove to believe that he had just been awakened to a sense of the wrong of his "carrying on" with two girls in the manner in which he had done, and determined to begin that very day to "taper it off with Kate." The real reason of his conduct, if he would have admitted it, was, however, that he was afraid that if he was pointedly attentive to Kate, Harry Mason might accidentally mention it to his sister, who -especially after what had been said on the evening on which she had made tea-would probably get it into her head that he was deliberately playing with her feelings. In which case he did her the justice of believing that whatever might be her love towards him she would throw him off, and this idea and a recurrence of the thoughts that had troubled him in the morning decided him.

To Georgey Clayton's extreme surprise therefore, he answered, "Oh, I must stop with Miss French; I've been talking to her most of the way down, and there's no other fellow looking after her."

There was no time to argue the point, and so, motioning to Harry, Clayton turned to the girls and said, as he offered his arm to Nellie, "Harry here will see you up, Kate, if you will allow him. Charley's going to help Miss French to the top."

She had fully expected Charley to attend her, and for a momont there came an angry flush to her cheek, but it was only for a moment, and no one noticed it. She remembered that in a matter like this she need not fear a rival in Miss French, and being a little smitten with a sense of the selfishness of her first impulse, she credited Charley with a degree of virtue to which he was scarcely entitled.

"I'm glad Charley was so good natured as to think of that," she said, in reply to Clayton: "it would have been a shame to have gone and left her to get up the hill by herself. In fact," she went on, looping up her skirts and placing her arm in Harry's," if she isn't better at climbing than I am, she wouldn't get up by herself at all. I'm afraid I shall be a great deal of trouble to you, Mr. Mason?"

Harry mumbled something about its being a

pleasure to be of service to her, and then they started up the hill.

In looking for favourable points of ascent the two couples soon lost sight of each other, and when he was fairly alone with Kate, Harry's nervousness and want of confidence returned upon him to an overwhelming degree. He could neither start a conversation nor keep one up when Kate did, and once or twice he nearly let her fall through his extreme fear of handling her roughly. With so much of his bashfulness as she had seen before starting, Kate, as we have seen, was rather pleased, but when in about half an hour they reached the summit of the hill she was beginning to be of opinion that she was getting a little too much of it, and to wish that Charley Thompson had not been so very thoughtful about Miss French. "I shall have a long rest here," she said, seating herself under the shade of a tree.

Harry stood beside her, fidgeting about uneasily, until her growing irritation at length found vent in the snappish tone in which she asked, "Ain't you going to sit down?"

"I may as well," he stammered, taking a seat beside her. He detected the impatience in her voice, and bitterly felt that he was "making a fool of himself." Still he could not manage to talk, while at the same time she looked so bewitchingly pretty, with her cheeks flushed and her bosom still heaving from exertion, that he felt an almost irresistible impulse to throw his arms around her.

Kate no longer attempted to lead a conversation, and Harry was aware that the dead silence that ensued was each moment making him look more ridiculous. Goaded by this thought he resolved that he would break through the restraint of his own bashfulness, and show her that he was anything but the nincompoop which he believed that by this time she must suppose him to be. Having screwed his courage to the speaking point, he wished to open with something brilliant; but there was no time for study, and, on the spur of the moment, he could hit upon no more interesting topic than the weather.

"It's a fine day," he suddenly observed.

"Very," returned Kate, curtly.

"It would have been a pity if it had rained?"

"Yes; it would have spoilt the party."

Under the circumstances the weather was not a prolific subject of discourse, and Kate's answers were in anything but an encouraging tone. For a minute or two he was once more reduced to silence, but presently he came in again, with—

"The view from here is very fine; isn't it?"

"Very," she answered, as shortly though not quite so sharply as before.

"The sparkle of the river where its windings catch the eye has a fine effect in the landscape."

"Yes, it's very pretty altogether," said Kate, who was now recovering from her petulant humour. "I suppose those are the sort of views artists come to take?"

"Yes, but no painter could put on canvas the glorious glitter and sunlight that we see, or if he did manage it he would be put down as unreal." The sound of his own voice in a tolerably rounded period greatly reassured him, but not as yet feeling secure against a relapse, he went on, without waiting for an answer, "A scene like that always reminds me of a fine descriptive passage in the 'Lady of the Lake.'"

"Oh," said Kate.

It was a very expressive "Oh," and at once prompted Harry to observe, "But, perhaps, you haven't read the 'Lady of the Lake?'"

"Not that I remember," she said. "What was it in?"

"In!" echoed Harry, with a puzzled air.

"I mean, which of the journals did it come out in?"

Had this question come from his sister he would have considered it a capital joke, but coming from Kate he was pleased to take it as a charming evidence of the absence of anything like affectation in her character. There was no shade of a sneer either in his smile or the tone of his voice, as he answered, "It was Sir Walter Scott's 'Lady of the Lake' I was alluding to, and that came out many years ago."

"Oh yes," she said, "I've read about him. There was pieces from his works in some of our reading books at school. And is this 'Lady of the Lake' a good thing?"

"Splendid," he answered. "It's a spirit-stirring story, and good ringing verse that carries you along with it. The plot of it is——"

He proceeded to give her an outline of the story, and his self-confidence fully returning as soon as he was fairly started on a hobby-horsical line, he recited the combat between Fitzjames and Roderick Dhu, and one or two other of the more dramatic passages as he led up to them. Kate sat a delighted listener, and showed her interest by the changing expression of her eyes and the eager way in which, when Harry had finished, she asked, "And what become?" of some of the characters.

When he had answered her questions, they got up and strolled leisurely along the top of the hill. Harry was now quite himself again. Indeed, he was something more than the self he had hitherto been. He felt unusually light and buoyant physically, and experienced an elation of spirits such as he had never known before. The impulse to talk was now as strong upon him as his bashfulness had been. His discourse for some time longer was still hobby-horsical, but you. I.

he managed his steed gracefully, and Kate liked its prancing. He gave illustrative passages from and sketches of the story of "Marmion," "the Corsair," and "Lallah Rookh," and Kate listened and questioned with unabated interest. In her turn she attempted to explain the plots of some of the stories in the weekly journals, which were her only reading, but these highly intricate plots were made wholly unintelligible by the frequency with which she had to hark back in her She would pull up short with some narration. such explanation as, "Oh, but before I come to that, I ought to have told you that the Duke de Beaumont was not the real duke! He was-Then she would rush away back, and before she got up to the point of digression, again would have to fly off at a tangent to pick up some other forgotten thread. But the mere sound of her voice was pleasant to Harry, and he professed to perfectly understand, and be deeply interested by her epitomes of "The Lord and the Lout, or Rank against Talent," and "The Millionaire's Marriage, or the Might of Money."

Had it come from any one else Harry would have been inclined to put her talk down as so much nonsensical prattle, but he no longer saw Kate by the same commonplace light by which he judged other people. He took her devotion to and belief in penny serial heroics as indications of great natural intelligence which only



required a little guidance; and what a delightful task it would be to guide it! he thought. To lend her books, Scott, and Byron, and Moore. To talk to her about them; to make her love you and develop a sympathy of soul within her, while forming her taste—to do this were indeed to be blessed. With this elysian vision floating through his mind, with Kate's arm pressed to his side, and her voice sounding sweetly in his ear, Harry as he sauntered along the mossy summit of the Beacon was in the seventh heaven of delight; was, metaphorically speaking, on a mountain of love compared with which the Beacon would have been but as a molehill.

"You must let me lend you Scott's Poems, Miss Fairfield," he said, when he had come so far earthward as to be capable of trying to give practical effect to his ideas. "I'm sure you'll like them."

Kate said she was sure she would, and accepted the offer.

Then their conversation became more chatty and familiar. Friends were discussed, and among others Charley Thompson's name was brought up.

"I shall always consider myself indebted to Charley for the happiness of this day," said Harry, when the name was mentioned.

He spoke in a manner that conveyed to Kate, as it was intended to do, that his introduction to her was the never-to-be-forgotten happiness for which he felt so grateful, and she blushed a little as she replied, "Well, Charley spoke very highly of you when he said he would bring you to the party."

"More highly perhaps, you think, than I deserve?"

"Oh, I don't say that."

"You are too kind to say so; but confess: didn't you think me a dreadful noodle when I was so mum and stupid just now?"

"Well, I did think you were rather slow," she answered, laughing.

"Ah, well," he said in the half earnest, half jesting tone in which their talk was running, "I cannot blame you for thinking it, and yet, if you had known all, you would not have blamed me for appearing so. There is a beauty, Miss Fairfield, which strikes a man dumb—that is, when it first bursts upon him," he added, joining in the smile which came across Kate's face as he was speaking. "I know I've found my tongue again. Perhaps you think I've found it too much?"

"No, that I'm sure I don't," she answered, with impulsive sincerity.

Chatting and laughing in this style they strolled slowly on, Harry without being too direct, deftly availing himself of every opportunity to pay a compliment or imply his own admiration.

Without the slightest verbal hint at such an arrangement, their manner already tolerably lover-like, suddenly became intensely so, when on approaching the dining place they became aware that those of their friends already assembled there were watching them. Harry's instinctive desire to shine, and Kate's instinctive spirit of coquetry were at once aroused. She leaned more confidingly upon his arm, and looked smilingly up in his face as he spoke, and each appeared to be so entirely engrossed by the other as to seem unconscious of the fact that they were observed. The nearer they came, the more loving they looked, a circumstance which led the resplendent Mr. Parker to sniff in a would-be contemptuous manner, and induced Georgev Clayton to exclaim. "I say, Charley, see the conquering hero comes."

When they sat down to dinner, Mr. Parker would fain have placed himself beside Kate, but she skilfully beat him off with her skirts, which she kept spread out, until on his retreating, she gathered them up to make room for Harry, who took the post of honour with an easy air, in which assurance and devotion were nicely blended.

The dinner—some of the parties gratified their genteel propensities by styling it a luncheon—was a plain affair, consisting chiefly of meat pies and fruit tarts, with porter and lemonade to wash them down; and it was eaten amid a flow of

cheerful small talk, in which Harry Mason took a rather prominent and successful part.

After dinner it was agreed that they should all walk over to the other side of the hill, to look at the ruins of an entrenched British fortress which could be traced there. Harry again escorted Kate, and as the sound of their laughter came back to Charley Thompson and Miss French, who were walking a little distance behind, Charley observed—

"He's coming out of his shell, isn't he? I thought this morning his first appearance on this sort of stage was going to be a failure."

"It would have been better for him if it had," she said, with a serious air.

"As how?" he asked, with a rather surprised look.

"Well, it would be a bad job both for him and his people, if he was to get entangled with Kate," she answered.

"As far as that goes," said Charley, with an off-handed toss of the head, "every fellow falls in love with Kate a bit at first. I did, at any rate, and I hardly know whether I've got over it yet."

"I think you have," she said, with a meaning smile. "I'll tell Fanny what a good fellow you've been to-day."

"Good!"

"Now you know very well what I mean; but

to come back to what we were talking about, Charley, I really don't like to see Harry so intimate with Kate all of a sudden."

"Well, I was just saying to him myself the other night, that if a poor man was to marry her, she'd be the bane of his life; but after all, Kate isn't such a terrible girl; there's plenty of good in her, and any sensible fellow might manage her if he was firm with her."

"I fancy any one who was firm and sensible enough to manage her would be too much so to marry her."

"If so, I don't think there's much danger of Harry doing it then."

"Well, I don't know, Charley; you must remember Harry hasn't the same notions about these things that you have, and he has been used to having his own way a good deal."

"Well, he can't run his neck into a halter for some time to come: he'll have to do something for his mother and sister first."

"That's just the thing that's made me speak to you. I don't want to say any ill of him behind his back, but you know, Charley, he hardly thinks as much of what Fanny and his mother have done for him as he ought to do, and then they think so much of him, that he would soon talk them over to anything; and if he was to get Kate for a wife, he'd be much more likely to come on to Fanny for help, than to give her any."

"Well, that's all very true, as far as it goes," said Charley, in a tone suggestive of his getting tired of the subject; "but you forget that whatever he may be with her, Kate is not at all likely to get desperately in love with him."

"Don't make too sure of that, Charley. I fancy she could easily think herself enough in love with him to marry him. Kate's getting older, like the rest of us, and she's got rid of some of the extra fine notions she used to have a year or two ago. A nice looking, nice talking young fellow like Harry is just the sort to suit her, and I know, though perhaps you don't, that Kate has a very uncomfortable home, and gets more anxious every day to get away from it."

"No, I wasn't aware of that, but at any rate we shall see what we shall see," answered Charley, and then the subject dropped.

After looking at the site of the old fortress, the party walked on to another part of the hill where there was a needle's-eye rock. A good deal of fun was got out of scrambling through the eye, and when that source of amusement was exhausted, some of them began to dance to music of their own humming, while the others looked on. When the shades of evening began to fall, they started back towards the Stonebury side of the hill, and before it was quite dark, all had safely reached the bottom on that side.

During the drive home, there was a little

singing and a great deal of flirting, and when they reached town all were in high good humour save Mr. Parker, who during the journey had adopted a severely gloomy air. On getting out of the brake, this gentleman made a last attempt to assert the position he had latterly assumed of being Queen Kate's special beau.

"Will you go home at once, Kate?" he asked, coming up to her as if it was quite understood that he was to see her home, "or will you take a bit of a turn round first?"

"As Mr. Mason here has been kind enough to offer to escort me, I'll go straight home," she answered, as she busied herself in shaking out the folds of her dress, and then, without even glancing at Parker, she took Harry's arm and walked away.

At the field gate mentioned in a previous chapter, Kate, as was her custom, came to a standstill.

- "And where shall I see you to lend you the book?" asked Harry, when they were parting.
 - "You can meet me any night leaving-off work."
 - "That means Monday night to me."
- "Very well, then I'll look out for you; and now I really must go."
- "Well, I suppose you must," he answered, as she made a slight effort to withdraw her hand which he had been holding for the last minute or so.

"Yes; it's getting late, you know."

There was silence for a few seconds, then he answered—

"Ah, well, such a good night as this is worse than an ordinary farewell, but it must be said, so I wish you

"'A fair good night,
And happy dreams, and slumbers light.'"

As he finished speaking he raised her hand to his lips, and then hurried away as if distrustful of his own resolution. His spirits were in a whirl of delight. He walked home as if treading upon air, and reached it in a vastly different frame of mind from that in which he had left it in the morning.

Kate, too, was in unusual spirits. She thought she had never met with such a delightful young fellow before; never met any one who looked and talked so like the noble lovers of the serial tales. Never but once, she added to herself after a while, and then she half thought, half sighed, "Poor Frank! I wonder what became of him; I should like to see him again."

BOOK II.

Reeping Company.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM-AND REALITY.

F readers will be kind enough to remember that it has been chiefly upon festival occasions that the course of our story has hitherto led them into the Mason household, it will be an advantage to all parties concerned—to themselves, the writer, and the "characters represented." Otherwise they will be likely to form a very erroneous opinion of the style of living incidental not only to that particular household, but to that class of establishment generally. The coming-of-age supper had been on a scale to be attempted but seldom in a lifetime, and only to be justified by an event, which, like Harry's coming out of his time, was likely to add to the income of a family, or a marriage tending to lessen its expenditure. The

tea to Charley, simple as it was, had been an extra one to the extent of the bloaters which Fanny had specially provided in his honour. In a general way the Masons lived very plainly: to be honest they had to do so. Bread cut so thickly and buttered so thinly that many of the better-off or more "proud stomached" of their own class would have been inclined to scout at it as "bread and scrape," served them at breakfast and tea, and it was only owing to Mrs. Mason's skill in converting scrag-ends into savoury stews and made-dishes that they had meat for dinner every day. On Sundays, however, they lived a little high, having relishes in the morning and afternoon, and a nice little roast of prime meat and a pudding to dinner. Herein Mrs. Mason, while acting in common with the bulk of the working classes, differed from many of her co-religionists, who, not ranking cooking as one of the works of necessity admissible on Sundays, and not being wealthy enough to sin vicariously by means of servants, fared less comfortably on Sundays than on other days. however, was merely a matter of causery; and Sister Mason sided with the anti-ascetic party. who, when sterner members accused them of being belly-gods and worshippers of flesh-pots, retorted by asserting that the conduct of their opponents smacked very much of the Roman Catholic practice of physical penances—a doctrine which they

professed to specially abhor. Once when Brother Waggley-who, of course, belonged to the "unco guid" division-had lectured her upon this matter until she was goaded into a rebellious spirit. Mrs. Mason had replied-"Well, the long and short of it is, I like my Sunday morning relish, and I mean to have it." And she did like Her Sunday breakfast relish was one of her weak points, and foremost among relishes stood. in her estimation, a rasher of bacon frizzled in a Dutch-oven so as to produce plenty of liquor. If she did hanker after the flesh-pots, this was the particular flesh-pot of her idolatry. rustiness in her rasher would produce a corresponding quality in her temper. Nothing in a small way so irritated her as having to wait for it a minute after it was done to a turn, and, on the morning succeeding the picnic she was sorely tried in this respect through Harry not coming downstairs at his usual hour. She had placed the bacon on the table till the liquor began to consolidate into grease, then put it to the fire again until the rashers were "dried-up to no-As she saw her favourite relish spoiling under this treatment she fumed and waxed Twice she had asked Harry if he was coming down, and on both occasions he had answered "Presently." But his answers had been merely mechanical—on that morning he had a soul far above bacon. Physically he was

wide awake, but mentally he was in a little Eden of his own. An Eden with modern accessories of course, and glorified with an Eve of the period, whose image was that of Kate Fairfield. There is probably nothing half so hackneyed in quotation as Moore's couplet

> "There's nothing half so sweet in life As love's young dream."

But then there is probably nothing at once half so true to general experience and poetical in expression as the sentiment embodied in the lines. The feasts of reason may be, ultimately, most conducive to happiness, but the feasts of imagination are ever the sweetest while they last. The dreams of ambition, glory, fame, and sometimes of hate and revenge, are all very pleasant, but there are none of them half so sweet as love's young dream. There are no other pictures of the imagination so paradisiacal in conception and bright in colour as those which are conjured up by

"The master love, A more ideal artist he than all,"

and one who differs from material artists in that his earliest work is usually his most glorious. Of the surpassing sweetness of love's young dream, Harry Mason was this morning having experience. Sometimes when he was more than ordinarily successful at the Debating Society, or something occurred in the workshop to make his superior general intelligence apparent, he would indulge in day-dreams of a time when he might be a great leader of his class—a people's tribune, in a position to speak so as "the applause of listening senates to command." Many a time. and oft had he, in imagination, hurled fierce philippics at the right honourable gentleman at the head of the government, or demolished the sophistical speeches of honourable members opposite. Often, in his mind's eve, had he seen himself riding the whirlwind and directing the storm when excited working-men had "assembled in their thousands" for trade or political purposes, and from such dreamings he had derived a spirit-stirring sense of joy. But such pictures as these paled into nothingness before the heavenly vision in which Queen Kate figured, superseding the applause of senates and the devotion of a people. He had been talking of Scott at the picnic; and when at length the turmoil of his spirits had settled into a broken slumber, his dreams had been a curious jumble of the poet. In dreamland he was Fitzjames, and Kate the Lady of the Lake, to whom he spoke of love as they wandered in a grove far lovelier than any on the shores of Loch Katrine; and his dream was, from a lover's point of view, an improvement upon that of the poem in other respects.

the Ellen of the story, Kate seemed to "listen with a blush and a sigh;" but when he "sought her yielded hand to clasp," the phantom did not change to a gigantic warrior with "grisly visage stern and hoar." In his sleeping as in his waking dreams she remained solely a vision of delight, a girl for whom the world were well lost, and without whose love life was not worth living for. In such a frame of mind more considerate and less imaginative persons than Harry would have been oblivious to such a consideration as the over-cooking of a rasher or two of bacon. and so his mother was left to fume until, in her own phrase, she was "regular worked-up." When at last she reached the bursting-point, she went to the bottom of the stairs, for the third time, and called out-

"Now then, our Harry, if you are not going to get up, say so at once; because if you don't want your breakfast, there's others as does, and don't like to see good bacon spoiling neither."

The length of this speech, and the loud and angrily energetic tone in which it was delivered, at length brought Harry down again to a remembrance of things mundane; and having first muttered "Bother your bacon!" he answered aloud, "Well, don't get into a stew; you can begin your breakfast. I'll be down in a minute."

He was annoyed at having had his love reveries broken in upon, while his mother was still sore on the subject of her relish, when he joined her and his sister at the breakfast-table; and seeing this, Fanny, with a view to preventing anything like a collision, struck up a conversation by asking—

"How did you enjoy yourself yesterday,

Harry?"

"Capitally!" he answered, instantly brightening up.

"I thought you would," she said. "I knew Charley would put you all right. He's a good fellow that way, isn't he?"

"Well, I dare say he is in a general way," he answered, with just a suspicion of a sneer in his voice; "but I suppose he thought I didn't require any putting right, for I only saw him at a distance after we got to the hill."

"Oh, I forgot! He'd be too busy attending to Kate to look after any one else," said Fanny, making a not very successful attempt to speak in a light laughing way.

"Well, from the manner in which I've heard people speak of them, I expected he would have been, but he wasn't. In fact, so far as he was concerned she might have got up the hill by herself."

Although Charley's proceedings at the party had been so much in favour of his own desires, Harry was consistently lover-like in being so inconsistent as to feel rather bitter against him for having appeared to think lightly of the honour of attending Kate.

This time the sneer in his voice was more decided, but it was still thrown away—neither his mother nor sister perceiving it. His answer thoroughly dissipated Fanny's jealous fears, and it was with a half stifled sigh of pleasure she asked—more with a view of keeping up the conversation than from any interest she now took in the matter—

- "Who did he take up the hill, then?"
- "Miss French. He was with her all day."
- "And more credit to him, too," said Mrs. Mason, joining in the conversation: "she's worth a dozen such as Kate."
- "That may be," he replied, "but one would hardly expect to find such a dashing blade as Charley thinking so. Young fellows generally would be of a different opinion."

As a rule, Mrs. Mason chimed in with her son's opinions—often without understanding them; but under all her complacency she had a temper of her own, and now it was roused. The subject of discourse was one of her sore points. She disliked Kate—disliked her generally as a fast, showy girl, and specially because she was under the impression that she tried to lure Charley Thompson away from Fanny. Her exasperation at the injury to her relish had not entirely worn off, and at last she had detected

the sneer in Harry's tone. It was therefore in an equally sneering tone that she answered—

"Very young ones, or very soft ones mightn't. But let me tell you that any fellow that had sense enough not to be caught by a doll's face, and to understand what's meant by handsome is as handsome does, would. I like to see a nice looking girl as well as any one, but if they've got no other recommendation, God help the poor man that gets them! especially when their good looks depend upon clothes."

"Who did see Kate up?"

Fanny asked the question, intending to create a diversion, but from the course things had taken at the picnic her query rather tended to make the situation more unpleasant. At another time Harry would probably have given some evasive reply, but his mother's manner had put him into a combative mood, and with a half-jesting, half-defiant smile, he answered,

- "Well, I suppose it's nothing less than a crime to say so, but I did."
- "You did!" said his mother, in an incredulous tone.
- "I did," he repeated, imitating his mother's emphasis, and then he told her how it had come about.
- "And pretty and dollish you found her, I'll be bound," said his mother, when he had finished.

"Very pretty, mother, but not at all dollish," he answered, in a cool, aggravating sort of way.

Throughout the conversation Mrs. Mason had been chafing at her son's manner, and she now fairly fired up, as she said, "Well, it's Sunday morning, and I don't want to quarrel; but I must tell you, Harry, that sharp as you think you are, you're talking like a fool. I should have thought you'd have seen through her at once; but I see you are going to be like the other silly boys—think her an angel till you find out she's making a donkey of you, and then think her worse than she really is."

"And she is very bad, I suppose. Ought to be marked dangerous, eh?"

"Well, I begin to think she would be dangerous, only she thinks herself far above the likes of you. She'll be as friendly as can be with a young working fellow the first time she meets him, and turn her back on him before a lot of others the next time."

"I know that is intended for me, but I'm glad to hear it for all that. Now that I've seen some of the young fellows that do go after her, I only wish I had the courage to get rid of fools in the same way."

"Well, they must be fools, that's certain," said Mrs. Mason, laughing at her own little joke; but that's not why Kate drops them: it's because nothing less than a gentleman will suit her high notions."

"I'm glad to hear that, too, for I think she knows what a gentleman really is."

"Oh, I know what you mean, Master Harry," said his mother, whose good humour was now returning; "but you are mistaken. Kate's gentleman musn't have greasy moleskins for her to wash, or come home with a black face: he must be of the tailor's block pattern, and have a good deal more money than sense."

"Ah, well, mother," said Harry, "I suppose that beauty in a girl is the reverse of charity: it discovers a multitude of sins; and I must confess that Kate is guilty of being very pretty. And now," he added, rising from the table as he spoke, "I'll go into the parlour and have a read."

"Well, I do hope our Harry wont get going after Kate," said Fanny, looking very serious, when he had gone.

"Well, I should rather fancy he wouldn't," said her mother, "nor after any one else either for a while. It wouldn't do for him to go gallivanting about after girls as soon as he was out of his time; but, lor' bless you, Fan, he was only having me on because he saw I was put out about the breakfast." Confident in this belief, Mrs. Mason cheerfully began to clear the table, while Fanny went upstairs to dress for chapel.

When he had shut himself up in the parlour,

Harry took up a book, but he did not "have a read." He fell to thinking - to thinking of Kate; and he speedily found that love's young reality was certainly not half so sweet as love's young dream. Being still strongly under the spell, he fervently assured himself that the first object of his life must be to court and marry Kate: but obstacles met him on all sides. had had a specimen of the opposition he would be likely to meet with from his mother, but he smiled in the midst of his vexation as he thought, "However, I could manage her. Of course," he mused, "I would never see her want for anything: my house would always be open for her if she needed it, though I don't think she would. Fan's business is increasing every day, and she can keep the place going and save money, and of course mother would rather be with her." Striving to pursuade himself that he had put the matter in a generous light, but really sustained by the belief that his mother and sister were too fond of him to offer any very determined opposition to a plan on which he had set his heart, he dismissed this part of the subject. But there were others who, though strictly speaking having no right to interfere in or anything to do with his private affairs—with his marrying or not marrying, marrying late or marrying early-would be more difficult to deal with in this matter than his own family.

He knew that the voice of the trade was dead against the once almost universal practice of a mechanic marrying and settling down as soon as he had finished his apprenticeship. practice had been wise enough perhaps when England held an autocratical position in the manufacturing world, when shops were "steadygoing," and machinery and the means of locomotion were comparatively limited. But it was certainly detrimental from a trade point of view in later and more fiercely competitive times. When in the race for wealth old steady-going firms were overthrown, it was found that the "oneshop" workmen forced into the market by such overthrows were of little use for general pur-It was found that their ideas as well as their manual skill generally run in one groove: that they were saturated with local prejudices; had repressive notions respecting all improvements that they considered new-fangled, and were given to constantly singing the praises of the good old shop of their idolatry as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction with all others. Not a pleasant kind of men these, nor a profitable one either, and so the trade wisely set their faces against the system which created them. became one of the unwritten but all-powerful laws of the trade, that a young fellow on coming out of his time should travel for some years. That he should make a grand trade tour and

gather experience in various branches of the trade and systems of management before settling down in any one shop or district. Harry Mason had thought this an admirable plan in a general way, but as the term of his own apprenticeship approached completion, he had come to have grave objections to it as applied to himself individually. It would have been all very well, he argued. if he had intended to remain in the workshop all his days, or even to rise out of it merely by superior skill and energy as a mechanic, but such was not his intention. He had no idea of remaining one of the ruck: he meant to be a leader; but the leadership at which he aimed was of the popular working man's friend, or people's tribune order; a leadership which should place him before the public as a spokesman and representative of labour in its disputes with capital. and probably raise him to the position of a working man's M.P., when the at that time much talked of but still to be accomplished extension of the franchise should take place. To these views he considered the usual plan of the trade would be detrimental. Changing from shop to shop, and from town to town, would throw him years back in the career he was marking out for In Stonebury, could he creditably stay on there as a journeyman, he was sure of soon being made secretary to the local branch of his Trade Union; and he believed he could perform

the duties of that small office in a manner that would bring him prominently and favourably before the trade at large. But then he couldn't see how he was to stay there. Men who didn't obey the understood decrees of the trade were not elected to offices—they were "sent to Coventry." In the midst of these troubles, however, a road was unexpectedly opened to him. One day, eight or nine months after his father's death, old Sandy Grant informed him that some of the leading hands—those who governed opinion in the shop—had been talking about him (Harry), and had come to the conclusion that, considering his circumstances, he might, without any detriment to his character for pluck or material injury to his trade prospects, stay in his present employment for two or three years after he was out of his time, in order to give his mother and sister a lift before he left home. For a minute this good news nearly silenced him, and Sandy, thinking he was hesitating, went on in a persuasive manner to point out that though he might think he could help his mother even if he was away from her, he would find that he could not do so to any considerable extent, since the habits and associations formed while knocking about the country were necessarily expensive. ing to be convinced, Harry consented to the arrangement, which then had the advantage of appearing as an act of self-sacrifice upon his part.

He had often congratulated himself upon this stroke of good fortune, which he believed had finally rid him of the particular troubles with which it was associated.

But upon this Sunday morning these troubles returned upon him, and in connexion with his dreams of love seemed even more vexatious than they had done when they threatened to thwart his schemes of ambition. He could easily manage his mother he had at once told himself, when the thought of her opposition occurred to him; but when he asked himself, "What about the men in the shop?" no such assuring answer was readily forthcoming. He knew that it was upon the express understanding that it was for his mother's benefit that the trade rule had been waived in his favour; and he had a pretty good idea that were he by marrying to appear to desert his mother (for he persuaded himself that the desertion would only be in appearance), he would in all probability have to leave Stonebury, and go he knew not where. His mates would consider themselves deceived and wronged; would taboo him; would grow terrifically virtuous on the subject of a son's duty to a widowed mother; would speak of him as a duffer, and make sarcastic allusions as to the advisability of some fellows summoning their masters to tell them what trade they were.

As he thought of all this, the picture of Kate

passing from town to town from one mean lodging to another as the wife of a poor working man, forced itself for an instant upon his mind, but he quickly shut it out: look on it again he dare He was aware that in a general way Kate would be inclined to look coldly upon the notion of having a working man for a husband, even under the best of circumstances; but in the sweet waking dream of the earlier part of the morning he had successfully met this obstacle. a lover's confidence he had told her, that though he was as yet a working man, he felt that he had within him the makings of something greater, and that with her love as an incentive. &c. &c. To this Kate had made some loving reply, and the thing had been settled.

But now the sombre shading of reality was blotting out the pretty dream picture. Even if the men did not make the shop altogether too hot for him, they would at any rate be "down upon" him to an extent that would preclude the possibility of their electing him an officer of their Union, and without this first step where would be all his cherished schemes of future greatness? As the unpleasant realities of his position rose before him, he sincerely anathematized the trade laws that interfered with his views. But cursing suggested noremedy. For a time hewas sorely perplexed, and of course quite made up his mind that never had the course of true love been so obstructed

But presently the egotism of his as in his case. character asserted itself, and brought consolation. "After all," he said to himself, "it will be awhile before anything definite has to be done, and in the interval I dare say I can talk over old Sandy and one or two more, and they'll manage the As likely as not, too," he went on, the rest. "I'm alarming myself without much cause: they'll perhaps be as anxious for me to stop as I am myself. It was all very fine them talking about my mother when they first told me I could stay on here, but I daresay, if the truth was known, they were thinking more about club They know very well that I could manage better, and bring more credit to the branch than any of those they've got for officers now."

These reflections brought him into a more favourable frame of mind, and following out the train of thought they suggested, he gradually got back again to the dreamy side of love, and was happy for the rest of the forenoon.

In the afternoon Sandy Grant came to tea, in accordance with the invitation given to him at the coming-of-age party, and was warmly received by Mrs. Mason and Fanny, Harry having gone out for a walk after dinner. In the course of conversation Sandy happened to say to Mrs. Mason that she had got a nice little house, whereupon she insisted upon showing him over

it. Some of the housewifely devices upon which she most plumed herself were to be seen in her back kitchen, and while Sandy was looking at them with such appearance of admiration as he could get up, she happened to look out at the door, and catching sight of Charley Thompson smoking and reading in a little summer-house that he and his landlord had built, saluted him with, "Well, Mr. Lazybones! not cleaned up yet?"

This brought Fanny to the door, and then she called out, "Oh! Mr. Grant, just come here and look at this idle fellow." She pushed him forward as she spoke, and then peeped out from under his arm; but he did not look at Thompson: he looked down at her, and noticed with a certain heartsinking the loving glance with which she regarded Charley.

"Holloa, Sandy!" said the latter, putting down his paper, "you see how these people use me. Shall I not take my ease in my summerhouse but I shall be called names, and on Sunday, too! But never mind, my ladies, I'll be straight with you; I'll tell Brother Waggley how you abuse your neighbour's lodger."

"Ah! you may go on about Waggley, Master Charley," said Mrs. Mason, "but it would be better for you if you were more like him. Do you know, Mr. Grant, Mrs. Johnson and me are always trying to get him to go to chapel,

but he only goes two or three times in the year."

"Well, let's hope it does him good when he does go," answered Sandy.

At this point Harry, who had just returned from his walk, came to the door, and Charley asked, "Have you been out, Harry?"

"Yes."

"Did you see any of the picnicers?"

"I met Miss Fairfield, and was speaking to her for a few minutes."

"Oh ay! let's see; you and Kate got tremendously thick yesterday; didn't you?"

"We got friendly, certainly."

"Of course, let us be polite. I sit corrected," said Charley; "or perhaps I should say, partly corrected," he added, after a pause. "Loving would be the correct word."

"Well, so I should think, from the way in which he talked about her this morning," said his mother; "but however, never mind that," she went on, noticing, though the others did not, a slight frown on Harry's face. "Will you come in and have a cup of tea with us?"

"Well, I don't like to say no to a good offer, but I must this time," he said, standing up. "I'm just going in to change my clothes, for Georgey Clayton and I have arranged to give the girls a treat by showing ourselves in town."

When Charley had gone in, the Masons and

their visitor returned to the parlour, and there Sandy spent one of the happiest evenings of his life. At tea Fanny attended to him just as he would have had the pretty blooming little wife he had pictured to himself the other night to have done. After tea she sat beside him on the sofa, and showed him their album, and talked with him in a free confiding manner that was very charming.

There was no shade of coquetry in this. had never occurred to her that the man to whom our Harry and Charley Thompson looked up as a superior, could ever regard her with any other feeling than one of patronizing friendship, while on her part she saw in him only the man who had acted kindly to their family in time of trouble; who had in many respects been a second father to her brother, and was a kind friend to It was, therefore, with perfect unconsciousness of the evil she was doing that she so bore herself towards Sandv as to strengthen his love for her: that she flitted about him, looked smilingly up in his face, or sometimes leaned on his shoulder to see which were the likenesses concerning which he asked questions as he turned over the leaves of the album. For the time being, however, Sandy was happy in the fool's paradise of love's young dream. The sunshine of Fanny's presence dispersed shadows, but they quickly gathered round him

again when he had left her, and to him the contrast between the dreams and realities of love seemed—in the first reaction of feeling at any rate—even darker than they had done to Harry He remembered Fanny's manner towards Charley Thompson, and now it began to dawn upon him also that she was too friendly with him; that there was but little hope of love for him where he most desired it. Sandy felt very miserable at this thought, but in the watches of the night comfort came to him. Was it not very likely, he asked himself, that her love for Charley might prove to be a case of And if Charley throwing pearls before swine? should be so insensate as not to prize this pearl of great price, why then-and for the second time within a week old Sandy Grant fell asleep. and dreamt of an ain fireside, with Fanny Mason as its goddess.

CHAPTER II.

WEIGHED, AND FOUND WANTING.

OMETIMES when I have been thinking about the life of my own class, I have been led to speculate upon that of others having widely different ways and means of living. In the essentials of family life—in the love of parents for their children, the long-suffering of mothers, the admiration and self-sacrificing of sisters for brothers, and the forgiving, not seven times but seventy, of family scapegraces-rich and poor have doubtless much in common, but there must be some curious differences between them in matters of detail. I wonder now, for instance, whether the son of a duke-say, who has an income in his own right, but continues to reside in the family establishment—pays for board and attendance? I do not know whether the question may appear a preposterous one, for you see I know nothing of the inner life of the aristocracy, save from novels; and having an idea that the novelist knows as little about it as I do,

I place no reliance upon their descriptions. Bulwer, of course, could elucidate such a point as this, but he would relegate it to the regions of the petty, while it is only with the great and beautiful that he deals. As to other novelists of fashionable life. I am afraid that even when they attain to the greatness of lions, it is only the show side of aristocratic life that is opened to them. But whatever may be the practice of the upper classes upon this point, it would appear from the statements of those who rushed into print upon the subject of the young man of the day, that in the middle classes, sons who have good incomes of their own are still allowed to "shove their legs under the parental mahogany" free of charge. If parents choose to permit this, that is their affair; but still one may venture to observe, in a general way, that the custom is an unwise, and. where there are daughters, often an unjust one; one too which certainly contributes in a material way to making the typical young man of the day the thing he is.

Among the working classes no such practice as this would be tolerated, nor indeed could it be supported. If from sickness or misfortune a man becomes incapable of maintaining himself, friends, neighbours, and fellow workmen, as well as his family, will cheerfully assist him, but apart from such incapacity as arises from uncontrollable circumstances, the rule of the class is self help.

and none are more strictly held to it than are the young men. If, in the working classes, any father was foolish and wealthy enough to allow a son who was earning enough to keep himself to shove his legs under the family deal-mahogany dining-tables do not obtain in this rank of life-without payment, and any young fellow was found mean-spirited enough to do so. the general body would cry out upon them; upon the father for being a fool, and the son for being a knave. As soon as ever the young men are able to keep themselves they must do so, and any difference their remaining at home may make in this respect is in favour of the parents. While a son pays rather more liberally for his board than a lodger would do, he is less troublesome, and more profitable to the household. Moreover, he is expected as a thing of course to make his mother and sisters occasional presents; to turn over partially worn out clothes to be made down for younger brothers; to bestow weekly spending coppers upon any of them who may not vet be at work, and to assist in the making or repairing of furniture, or such other household jobs as were once solely reserved for "Father." Finally, whether he lives at home or not, it is expected from a son who has come to manhood, that should the circumstances of his parents at all require it, and his at all admit of it, he will do something for them.

Of all this Mrs. Mason was perfectly aware, and she had been making calculations based on her own view of the application of this understood law to her family affairs. While her son was an apprentice she expected nothing from him, and she had experienced all the blessedness of the non-expectant. But though during his seven long years she had not looked for anything in the time being, she believed that she was laving up treasure in the future; and now the longcoming good time had arrived; her metaphorical ship had come in-our Harry was a journeyman. Now she expected a great deal, and she speedily began to experience that disappointment which as certainly attends the expectant state as does blessedness those who expect nothing. things considered, her expectations were perhaps not greater than she had a right to form, but she soon had good reason to think that they were much greater than were at all likely to be realized. While her husband was alive, her idea had merely been that, as during Harry's apprenticeship his sister's interests were avowedly sacrificed to his, he should as soon as he was out of his time contribute liberally towards setting Fanny up in business. But under the change of circumstances consequent upon poor Joe's death her views had become more extensive. notion latterly had been that, on coming to manhood, Harry would, as a matter of course, take the

position of head of the family; would, as his father had done, bring home his wages and hand them to her to make the most of for the general good.

But Harry, who had also been making his calculations upon these matters, did not see them in this light; especially since he had met Kate. and came to the conclusion, among others, that if he was to woo and win her it would be necessary for him to smarten up—to dress well and enter into the amusements patronized by the needledrivers—and try to put a bit of money together. He had fallen upon a very pleasant way of reasoning with himself upon this subject, had If his mother and sister had really been dependent upon him, he argued, he would have considered it his duty to have taken the responsibilities of the household upon himself, but as it was, there was no need for him to do so. was Fanny with a capital business—a business of a class that turned in far more money than most people were aware of. She was quite able and willing to keep her mother and him too, if he liked, but of course he wouldn't let her do that. No, hang it! he would find all his own clothes, and pay his mother ten or twelve shillings a week for his board, and that would be like found money to her, and would enable her to purchase some of those things the buying of which, he had a sort of a remembrance, had been put off on his He felt in a glow of generosity, as he account.

came to this determination; and was much surprised at the coolness with which his mother listened to the explanation of his intentions.

It was chiefly on her daughter's account that Mrs. Mason was disappointed. Believing that between the brother and sister it would merely be a case of turn and turn about in bearing the brunt of the household expenses, she had spent Fanny's earnings freely upon Harry, and though what the latter proposed would materially relieve the pressure upon his sister's income, it still left her to defray the largest share of the expendi-During their time of trial she had come ture. to understand her daughter better than she had ever done before, and she felt that in this matter injustice was being done to her. It was therefore in something of an apologetical tone that she told Fanny of her brother's proposal, and explained her own views respecting it.

"It's for your sake I'm vexed, Fan," she said. "Though I haven't said much about it, I know how good you've been to me since poor father died, and I wouldn't like you to think that I wanted to impose on your kindness, or favour Harry at your expense. If I hadn't have thought he was going to do better than this, I'd not have made so free with your money as I have done of late."

"Why, mother, how can you talk so!" exclaimed Fanny, in a softly reproachful tone. "It's

how good you've been, I think. What would Harry and I have done, if you hadn't struggled and kept the home together for us?"

"Well, he might have spoke about paying you back something," said the mother, coming back to her text: "he had the money for the last suit from you all in a lump, not to speak of other things."

"But then, mother, Harry knows that I don't expect anything back from him; at any rate, not now. It's when we want it, that we should help one another, and if I was to fall ill and couldn't work, then you'd see how Harry would come out."

"Well, there's something in that."

"Of course there is; and when you think of it, you know, mother, what Harry's going to do isn't so bad. Twelve shillings a week is what Charley pays Mrs. Johnson."

"Ay, but there's a difference between a lodger and his landlady and your brother and us. Though, as far as that goes, I believe that if even a landlady had done but half as much for Charley as we've done for Harry, he'd have behaved better to her than Harry has to us. There's no use in speaking against my conscience or deceiving you, Fan," she went on, beginning to pace up and down her daughter's little work-room, in which the conversation took place; "the long and short of it is, Harry hasn't behaved well in the affair."

"Oh, don't be hard on him, mother."

"Hard on him!" exclaimed the mother, ex-"Whenever was I hard on him? know I'd rather work my fingers to the bone than that he should want for anything, or be made to look little before his shopmates. him that's hard. Fan, he hadn't even a kind word for me. He spoke just as if I was some strange landlady that he was driving a bargain If he had just said I'll give you so much with. a week regular, mother, but if you want a little more at any time, just let me know-if he had just said something like that, I wouldn't have I wish he had spoke so, for his own sake; cared. I would have been so proud of him then; but as it is, I'm disappointed, Fan-sorely disappointed. It wasn't what I expected from Harry, after all these years."

"Well now, mother, that's very likely what has put you out so much," said Fanny, with the air of one who had suddenly seen a natural explanation to an apparently inexplicable matter. "I've been that way myself before now. Sometimes when I've expected there would be a certain thing for dinner, and then there's been something else, I haven't liked it, however good it was, and that's perhaps how it is with you about Harry?"

"No, it's not that, Fan. Of course I don't like to have my fancies upset any more than other people, but it's not on my account that Harry's selfishness cuts me to the heart so; it's on his own. I love him as much as you do, and once or twice before, when things he's done have inclined me to think this way about him, I tried to shut my eyes to his faults; but there's no use in doing that any longer. I understand these things better than you do, Fan, and Harry has acted very selfishly. Why, I could see that he thought he was doing us a great favour in paying for his board at all; he seemed to think as if you and I had been made for nothing else but to be of use to him."

"Oh, come now, mother," said Fanny, coaxingly; "you're vexed. It's only been thoughtlessness upon his part. I daresay, if you were to ask him for more money, he'd give it you in a minute."

"But I wont ask him for more—I wont ask him for any," exclaimed Mrs. Mason, vehemently. "It isn't for the money I care; I don't want to be a burden on him. I can work for myself if it comes to that; and I have you, Fan, I have you."

As she uttered these last words, her voice became soft and trembling, and though she did not actually cry, the tears stood in her eyes as she came to a stand and leaned over her daughter's chair. There was a brief pause, and then in the same low gentle tone she went on—

"You've been as good as gold to me, Fan—better perhaps than I deserve. God bless you for it! But if ever I wasn't fair to you, it was because I thought Harry would have made

it up to you. You wont blame me, will you, Fan?"

"You shouldn't keep on talking, mother," said Fanny, gently. "This affair has upset you altogether. Why, how could I have anything to blame you about—you never did anything to any of us that wasn't good and kind?"

"Well, I never meant to, that I can say from the bottom of my heart," answered the mother, more cheerfully; "and if you are pleased about Harry, I don't see that I need put myself so very much out of the way; then, after all is said, what he's going to give will be a great help."

"That's just what I say; and beside, don't you see, mother, that if he isn't giving the money to you, he'll be saving it, and it'll be in hand if anything was to happen."

To this Mrs. Mason made no reply, and Fanny went on, "Or, I'll tell you what, perhaps he means to give us a surprise; say nothing, you know, but save up a few pounds and give it you in a lump, or buy something for the house. At any rate," she concluded, "I wouldn't wonder any day to see him bringing you home some such present as a new dress piece or a new bonnet."

She spoke in perfect good faith. Her belief in her brother's goodness was in no wise shaken, and her mother, as she became calmer, caught something of her hopefulness.

To Mrs. Mason, however, the tale of hope was

more of a reproachful than flattering character. Perhaps she had been too hasty, she thought; had suspected Harry of not intending to act justly, simply because he had not set about doing so in the particular manner she had looked forward to. If she had accused him wrongfully, what a wicked creature she must be, and what must Fanny think of her; worse than that, what would Harry think, if he was ever to know how she had spoken of him—really it was dreadful.

Fanny, who had a pretty correct idea of the direction her mother's musings were taking, at once set about dispelling her fears. She told her that, of course, she knew that she had spoken with the best of intentions, and equally of course there was a good deal in what she had said, as no one would have agreed more readily than Harry, if he had happened to give the matter a thought. With such talk as this, Mrs. Mason was soon brought into a more cheerful frame of mind, and as her spirits rose, her belief in the more hopeful view of Harry's proceedings so increased, that by the time she left her daughter's room, she once more felt assured that all her visions of great things to be when Harry should have come to journeyman-hood would yet be realized.

As the weeks went on, however, doubts and fears assailed her again; hope, withering, fled; and the bright visions founded on it sighed fare-

While there was no sign of Harry buying well. anything for the house, or making the slightest present to his mother or sister, there was abundant evidence that he was not saving his money. He evinced a decided tendency towards gaiety and extravagance. Occasionally he stayed from work for a day, merely saving to his mother that he was going to a bit of a party. week he was buying himself new clothes, and in the evenings he would hasten out dandily dressed, and not return till late at night. always seemed driven for money, too. Towards the end of the week he would often borrow small sums from his mother. Before 'three months had elapsed, he began to fall behind in the payment of his board money, a circumstance which he requested his mother not to mention to Fanny; while he borrowed money from the latter, asking her not to mention it to her mo-Sometimes he would make a sort of apologetical reference to his expenditure, saving that he wanted to get a good stock of clothes together, as it was the most economical plan in the long run; and that after a while he would be able to save.

"Well, as you're going on, it strikes me it'll be after a long while," said his mother, on one of the occasions when a variation of this excuse was added to the information, that he wouldn't be able to pay for his board that week. "It's all

very well about having a stock of clothes when you can pay for them; but if you were in lodgings, where, if you went home and said you couldn't pay your board, they'd tell you, 'but you must, though,' you wouldn't be able to pay for so much finery as you do, Master Harry; and, after all, I don't see that you should make a greater convenience of me than you'd be let to do of a landlady. If it had been for working clothes I wouldn't have cared so much, but as it is, just let me tell you that you are getting a good deal too fal-lal-ish in your dress and ways, and I'll be bound there's others as think so, as don't know so much about it as I do, and I'm telling you this for your good, though I daresay you don't think 80."

Harry didn't think so: his opinion was that he was being badly used. Didn't he mean to pay up the money? of course he did—after a while. But it wasn't the money that was really the grievance. No! it was because he hadn't consulted her or Fan as to what clothes he should get, and sometimes stayed out a little later than he used to do; because, in short, they had been disappointed in not tying him to their apronstrings, now that he was a man. And they should be disappointed, too. He didn't mind anything in reason, but he wasn't going to stand that.

This was what Harry thought, and what he

felt very much inclined to tell his mother, but he saw that she was in a mood for energetic and loud disputation, and he had particular reasons for not wishing Fanny to be brought downstairs by the noise of a controversy, which, whatever might be its real merits, had certainly arisen out of him not paying his board. He therefore maintained a discreet silence, and having finished his tea as his mother's tirade reached the point just indicated, he went into the back kitchen to wash, and the threatened storm passed off.

- "Did you hear me talking to Harry before he went out?" asked Mrs. Mason, when later in the evening she was helping her daughter with her needlework.
 - "No," answered Fanny.
- "Oh, I had to give him a bit of a talking to. In fact, when I began, I meant to have given him a good piece of my mind, and I would too, if he had said two words to me, for I was finely put out, I can tell you."
 - "Why, what was the matter?"
- "Well, there's that much the matter, Fan, that it just comes to this, that Harry's way of carrying on wont do. He hasn't agreed to do so very much that he should be let off sticking to his bargain, and to-night makes six-and-thirty shillings he's behind for his board; and if it's left to him, it'll get more instead of less; but he'll have

to alter, I can tell you. It would be hurting himself to let him go on."

"Behind with you for his board?" said Fanny, with a bewildered look.

"There now, I've forgot he told me not to tell you; but, however, it's out now. He paid me nothing five weeks ago; twice since he's only paid me half, and to-night again he's not given me anything."

"Well, I wouldn't have thought it. I am sorry," said Fanny, in a low musing tone, and speaking more to herself than to her mother.

And she was sorry; was more sorely grieved than she had ever been before, save on the day she stood by her father's deathbed. belief in her brother, the faith of years, had been shattered by a random shaft. What her mother had just said had put her brother's character in a light by which she saw its flaws; and such flaws—meanness, selfishness, and, worse than all, want of trust in those who loved him so well. It was not for the money she cared, that would not have cost her a moment's thought, except to find excuses for his getting into debt. grieved her was the discovery that he had been playing her mother and her against each other, and imposing on both; that when borrowing from her he had lied—had made a tool while professing to make a confident of her. told her that the sums he asked for were for Let we much neither in well his matter at the way that the way in a mount for engager in the theoretic manner for not visiting. Fainly to be impossive investigative to the loose of a controversal, which, where might be to real nerves, had servainly arises at the lot saying his housed. He therefore maintained a discreet silence, and having hisses had the lot at his mother's tirende reached in hour our indicated, he went into the last tirence to wash, and the threatened states make the

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his mother, as he would not fall behind with her upon any consideration, while at the same time he was rather pressed for some little things for She had thought his resolve to pay his mother at all hazards "so noble," and had been very proud of his confiding his difficulties to And now she saw that all this was selfish hypocrisy, that his conduct to his mother had been mean, while he had, as she put it, been making a fool of her. It was a heavy blow-a blow which, so to speak, fired a train; for by this new revelation she saw many of her brother's past actions in an unfavourable light. Our Harry was suddenly dashed from the pedestal to which she had elevated him, and all the king's horses and all the king's men would never place him on it firmly again. Her affection for him might increase with a knowledge of his weakness, but not all the efforts of a loving self-stultification could ever restore to her the implicit unquestioning belief in his nobility of character, which had been so sweet to her in the years gone by. judging him by the unnaturally high standard she had herself set up for him, she of course did him an injustice, but of this she was quite unconscious. Her admiration of her brother had been as part of herself, and she felt his fall very bitterly.

"No! I wouldn't have thought that of our Harry," she said again, after a rather lengthy

silence; and her mother, seeing that the subject was distasteful to her, let it drop. But though she did not speak of what she styled her son's "carryings on," she thought of them a good deal; thought of them seriously, though still in a somewhat lighter vein than did Fanny. making a proximate calculation of his expenditure since he had been out of his time, she came to the conclusion that it had not all gone in clothes; and yet what else had it gone in? there was the And where did he spend his time, too, now that he went out every evening, and came home He didn't spend it in public-houses, and had no reason to believe that he was at all wild. She knew, too, that he was now hardly ever with Charley Thompson, nor, so far as she was aware, did he knock about with any of his other shop-Then, as it was summer, the Debating Society did not meet, and there was no place of amusement open. In short, she knew a great deal of how he didn't spend his spare time and cash, but nothing of how he did, and she felt very much annoyed in consequence.

"I daresay it isn't anything very particular, but at the same time I would just like to know what he is up to," she would say to herself, when pondering on the matter; and by-and-by she obtained the much-desired knowledge. It came upon her unexpectedly, in much the same way that the knowledge of her brother's scheming in vol. 1.

money matters had come upon Fanny, and it had much the same kind of effect. The news, unpleasant enough in itself, was made doubly so by the circumstances under which it was delivered.

It was the custom in Stonebury for families to make their own bread, and the public bakehouse, being a place wherein women gathered together, it will be easily understood that a good deal of gossiping, as well as of bread and dinner baking, went on in it. Here innumerable canards were started, and who'd-have-thought-it stories publicly told—in confidence. Here characters were tomahawked beyond all chance of recognition, and reputations sneered away; for even among those who have to make up their own dough for the oven, there are Lady Sneerwells. , Failing a supply of the more ordinary forms of tattle, the dames brought together at a setting-in time, would amuse themselves by baiting some one among them, and it was by an exercise of this irritating process upon herself that Mrs. Mason was made aware of the nature of Harry's "carryings on."

"I suppose you'll be making the cake soon?" said the woman who stood next to her at the baking bench.

"What cake?" asked Mrs. Mason, without looking up.

"Listen, there now!" exclaimed the other,

loud enough to be heard by the rest of the women, to whom she gave a meaning glance. "That's good, isn't it?" She went on when she saw she had secured the general attention, "I tell her I suppose she'll be making the cake soon, and she says 'What cake?' as if she didn't know very well that I meant the wedding cake."

- "That I'm sure I didn't; and what's more, I don't know now whose wedding cake it is you're talking about."
- "Why, whose should she mean but your son's?" said another of the women.
- "My son's!" said Mrs Mason, laughing. "I thought you'd got hold of some wrong pig by the ear."
- "Well, all I've got to say is, that if he isn't the right pig, he ought to be ashamed of himself for looking so like it," said she who had spoken first.
- "And who, for goodness sake, do they say he's going to marry?"
- "Kate Fairfield, to be sure," was the prompt answer.

Then the light rushed in upon her. Kate Fairfield! Why, after the way in which Harry had spoken on that Sunday she might have thought of this, but then she had never supposed that Harry would think of anything of that kind for years. The blow fairly broke down her guard, and she showed her distress, as she asked, "What makes people think that?"

The gossips were not a wilfully cruel body, and when they saw by the scared look on her face that what was sport to them was torture to her, they immediately altered their tone.

"Well, Mrs. Mason," said she who had commenced the baiting, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Upon my word, I thought you had an idea how things were, or I wouldn't have spoken so."

"But is there really any reason for speaking so?" asked Mrs. Mason, making a faint attempt to smile as a still fainter hope that they had only been quizzing her crossed her mind.

"Well, it's very certain," the other answered, "that he's running after her. He's with her almost every night, and takes her to country parties; and he's learning dancing at Steperson's, so as to be able to take her there in the winter."

"Yes, and for all so much as he's with her," said another woman, "he's that far gone about her as he must write to her if he's only away for a day. I know them as have seen the letters; regular long flowery letters, with poetry and all sorts of fine things in them, like what you read in newspapers, and as she could hobble him over if she liked if he didn't marry her."

"And what's more," said the first speaker, "I've seen the fine books that he's give with my own eyes; and I fancy her mother isn't far out.

when she says that it would be a match any day if Kate would only say the word."

"Yes," said she who had spoken about the letters, taking up the discourse, as if it had been a duet, "it's her that's hanging back. But, of course, we all know what she is: it's my Lord John Thomas that she wants; but she begins to see that she'll have to up with a John Thomas without the Lord, and so she keeps one on the hook; and all I have to say is, that I pity his case if she takes him down. If your son is as heart and soul fond of her as they say he is, you may pray for Lord John to turn up and put his candle out."

"Well, you've given me my tea, any way," said 'Mrs. Mason, and then she left the place.

On getting home she went straight to her daughter's room and dropping into a chair, exclaimed, "Well, Fan! I don't know what we may live to see, but I've just had my eyes opened, and no mistake!"

This was a favourite expression with Mrs. Mason, and frequently preceded disclosures which were scarcely so wonderful as a stranger might have anticipated would have been the case. The "Oh!" with which Fanny received it on this occasion was a very placid one, but the "Oh!" with which she greeted the further announcement, that it was the discovery of what our Harry was up to, and how he spent his money, that had

produced the eye-opening effect—the "Oh!" which this information elicited was as expressive of suddenly aroused interest as an Oh could be; and it is an exclamation that can be very expressive. As she uttered it, Fanny put down her work, and then, for the first time noticing the troubled look on her mother's face, quickly added, "It's nothing very bad I hope, mother?"

"Well, it's nothing as any one can touch him for," she answered, seeing that her manner had alarmed Fanny; "but at the same time you may guess it's nothing very good." Then she told her what had passed in the bakehouse—told her after her own fashion, accompanying the narrative with much indignant comment, and a running fire of such expressions as, "There's for you!" "What do you think ofthat, now?" "Would you have thought it of him now, Fan?"

"Saying nothing about us, Fan," she went on when she had finished the main story, "I thought he'd have had more sense on his own account. If he does make a fool of himself with her, it's very certain that he'll miss this home before it will miss him, though, God knows, I'd have been sorry to have thought so, let alone say it, six months ago."

"Well, I'm afraid Kate's hardly the sort to make a comfortable home," said Fanny.

"No, not for any one," said her mother, "let alone for a fellow that has been used to such a

home as this, though I say it as shouldn't. But home or no home, Fan, there's just this in it—he isn't going to fall behind with me, to be making her presents and dressing himself up to go gallivanting about with her, and I mean to tell him so too, in a way he wont like. If ever I told anybody a piece of my mind, I'll tell it to him to-night; and as to her, I'm sure if I was to meet her now, I'd slap her brazen face."

Fanny, however, was for milder measures: her thoughts were not of resenting want of confidence or ingratitude upon her brother's part, but to save him from himself. Perhaps matters had not gone so far as the women had made out, she urged; and, in any case, violence would only make bad worse. She suggested that Charley Thompson should be consulted and other inquiries made before any action was taken, and finally her pacific counsel prevailed.

The next day being Saturday, it was half-holiday with the railway men, and as he came home from his afternoon stroll round town, Charley Thompson dropped in at Mason's, and Fanny hearing him speaking to her mother, came downstairs.

After the exchange of a few commonplaces, Mrs. Mason went directly to the subject she had at heart. "Look here, Charley," she said; "I'm not going to deceive you in any way. You needn't answer me unless you like; but I'm going to ask you whether a certain thing as I've

heard about our Harry—and as I think is anything but a credit to him—is true."

"Well, I hope it's something less than murder," said Charlev.

"It's no joking matter, any way," said Mrs. Mason, rather tartly. "It's just this—that he's going after that Kate Fairfield; not going with her, as you or any other sensible young fellow might do, just because you happened to meet her or liked her dancing; but courting her properly, and, to put it in a lump, wanting to marry her. Now, is it true, Charley?"

Her voice trembled a little as she asked the question, and she looked pleadingly into his face as, with unusual carnestness, he answered, "Honour bright, Mrs. Mason, I don't know."

"But what do you think?"

"Well, it's this way, you know," he answered,
"I belong to the shop Boat Club, and Georgey
Clayton and I have been on the water most of
our evenings lately, so that I don't know much
about what's been going on in town. Still,
speaking in a general way, I should say that it
wasn't true: I should fancy that he'd have no
thought of marrying either her or any one else
for some years yet."

"Well, it ought to be that way, Charley; but if that's all you're depending on, I'm sorry to say I think it's not much. You must have seen how dressy he's got, and it's all to go about showing off with her. He's with her nearly every night, and takes her to parties."

"Well, as far as that goes," said Charley, "most fellows run after Kate for a while when they once know her. You women don't like her, I'm aware, but she's a deuce of a fascinating girl for all that, is Kate—at first," he added, seeing that Fanny was looking hard at him; "but he'll soon get over that."

"And he goes to Steperson's dancing classes, too. What would Mr. Grant and some of his other shopmates think of him if they knew that?"

"Of course he might spend his money in a more profitable way," said Charley; "but now-adays a fellow is expected to be able to do a bit on the 'light fantan;' and as there's no two-penny hops to pick it up at in this town, I suppose he must go to the dancing classes first if he wants to shape well at the dancing parties. Beside, I don't see, that because he's taking dancing lessons, it follows that he's going to be married."

"It's only to be able to go with her that he's learning."

"That's what you've been told?"

"And what I believe, too."

"Well but, Charley, he makes her presents of fine books, and writes letters to her," said Fanny.

"Whe-eugh!" whistled Charley, "that's round another corner altogether; that does look

like as if he meant something serious. But then, it mightn't mean much in this case," he added, after a pause. "You know Harry is rather given to doing the highflying sort of thing?"

"Ah, but I believe they are such letters that she could either make him stick to his bad bargain, or pay for getting out of it," said Mrs. Mason; "and I'm sure she's just the sort of madam to do it."

"There I differ from you, Mrs. Mason. I think that your greatest chance in this matter is, that however much he may want to marry Kate, she wouldn't care about marrying him when it came to the point."

"And there I differ from you then, Mr. Thompson," said Mrs. Mason, bridling up. "Our Harry hasn't turned out as we expected, but for all that I should be sorry to think that he wasn't too good for her. As to the running after, I believe it's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other with them, and there's no danger but what she'll snap at him if she gets the chance."

This was inconsistent upon Mrs. Mason's part, but Charley had sense enough to understand that under the circumstances it was also natural. For a moment he had felt inclined to argue the point, but his better sense prevailed, and he merely observed—"Well, we'll put that down as a matter of opinion; that'll be the best way, eh, Fan?"

Fanny assented, and then he went on—" But I think we can all agree that such a marriage would be a bad thing. As far as I'm concerned, I'd do anything in a fair way to prevent it. Of course, I've no right to interfere, and I know interference often makes matters worse; but still I could venture to offer a word of advice with a clear conscience, because, Mrs. Mason, while it would be chiefly on account of you and Fanny that I should care, I do think it would bring misery to Kate as well as Harry."

Charley flattered himself that he had put his view of the case very neatly, but Mrs. Mason's dislike to Kate was too inveterate to be disarmed with a sop.

"Oh, I might have known that you'd blow her trumpet," she answered, tossing her head. "It's not so long since the talk was that you was going to marry her; but perhaps she wouldn't have you either, as she's so very high minded?"

"Ah now, Mrs. Mason, that's a nasty jar; you hurts my feelings, you does," said Charley, laughing, while Fanny blushed, and exclaimed, "Oh for shame, mother, to talk that way to Charley."

"For shame, fiddlestick!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason. "He knows I only said it because I am put out; and I am put out about it, Charley, more than I can tell you."

"I'm sure you both are, and I don't wonder

at it either," said Charley, "though, at the same time, I should hardly think there was much real cause for alarm."

"Well, there's something in it, Charley," said Fanny; "and if you would speak to him about it we would be so much obliged to you: he might take it better from you than from mother or me. You could show him what a bad thing it would be for himself."

"That'll have to be the key-note with any one who wants to persuade Harry out of it if he's set his mind on it," thought Charley, but he answered, aloud—-" Well, you know, Fan, no one likes to interfere or be interfered with in a matter of this sort; still I'd speak to Harry in a minute, if I was quite sure there was any necessity for it."

"Well, I'll tell you what I heard," said Mrs. Mason, and then she once more repeated what she had heard in the bakehouse.

"Of course, all that looks rather blue," said Charley when she had finished; "but I darcsay there's not much in it—bakehouse stories are always overdone."

"But, Charley, they have no reason for telling lies about it," said Fanny.

"I don't suppose they told lies, Fan; but they very likely stretched the truth a good bit. Whatever a story may be when it goes into a bakehouse, it's sure to be a good deal more than true when it comes out. You see everybody joins in

the telling of a story there, and then they go upon the capping system, each one thinks herself bound to put a bit of a clincher to what her neighbour says, so that against a story has been the round of the bench it wants the salt-cellar."

"If you don't believe what I was told, can you get to know the truth yourself then?" asked Mrs. Mason, in a tone of challenge.

"Well, I dare say I can," answered Charley.

"As this is the last evening of the Band season, I'm going into The Limes, and I shall likely see some one there who will know how the land lies. At any rate, I can take soundings."

"And if you should find that it's true, will you talk to him?" asked Fanny, as Charley was moving towards the door.

"Yes, if you wish it," he replied; "though in that case I fancy he'll be past praying for."

CHAPTER III.

TAKING SOUNDINGS.

TEPERSON'S was one of the institutions of Stonebury, and the father and daughter, proprietors thereof, ranked among the characters of the town. Percy Steperson was a smartly built old fellow, who

Steperson was a smartly built old fellow, who affected what he conceived to be the manner of a half-pay cavalry officer of the old school. wore blue cutaway coats, white or buff waistcoats, and broadly striped trousers tightly strapped over creaking patent-leather boots. His plump, port-winey complexioned face was clean shaven, with the exception of an iron grey moustache, the curl of which was as fierce as the cock of his shiny hat. He had imitated the straddling gait sometimes seen in men who have to be much on horseback, until he had become habituated to it, and he carried his walking-stick swordwise across his shoulders, or flourishingly went through the cuts with it as he went along. But if a dandy, Steperson was not an idler: on the contrary, he was a most energetic and industrious old fellow.

He was the resident agent for the theatre, and the leader of its orchestra when it was open. He was an organizer of cheap trips, too. Steperson's cheap and fast excursions being household words in Stoneyshire. Finally, he did an extensive trade as a getter-up of processions, and of marriage, birthday, harvest home, and other festivities; his monster marquees, portable dancing floors, excellent quadrille bands, and processional banners and devices, being as widely known and greatly run upon as his excursions.

The daughter was equally characteristic in She was a dark handsome Amazonian sort of girl, rather heedless of conventionalities. and given to showy dressing. The sort of a girl of whom "they-say" stories are told. "They" said in Stonebury that she smoked; that she betted; that she had horsewhipped a man; but these stories were only founded on fact. She could smoke a cigarette, and occasionally did so in fun. When arranging trips to race meetings, her father sometimes got a tip which she would back, and once or twice, when she had won considerable sums, she astonished Stonebury by coming out gorgeously dressed in the winning colours. Once in the cavalry week a drunken member of the Yeomanry had attempted to force himself into one of her dancing parties, and, in return for some insulting expression, she cut him across the face with his whip which had dropped from his hand in the scuffle; her father, whom the noise brought upon the scene at this point, completing the discomfiture of the amateur dragoon by kicking him out.

She was looked upon as a sort of local Mrs. Siddons. For years she had been the child of the theatre, going on in "Richard the Third," "Belphegor," and "The Stranger," when the companies that visited the town put up these favourite provincial plays. Later she had played larger parts, and now she was leading lady to several of those Amateur Dramatic Clubs, the sin of whose airing their vanity by an appearance on any stage is among the multitude covered by charity. always played with the professionals on occasion of her father's benefit, and sometimes. " for one night only," for other benefits at the end of a season, and at such times she fairly held her own. Indeed, the Stonebury Gazette was decidedly of opinion that she did more. It spoke of her Bella, in the "Wreck Ashore" as "a marvellous piece of acting: such a combination of dramatic instinct, careful study, and energetic rendering as it has rarely been our lot to witness." of her Starlight Bess that it was "the most passionately conceived and executed reading of the character ever seen on these boards—boards on which it has been played by some whose names posterity will not willingly let die." It coupled her "Fight that man!" in "Camilla's

Husband," with the "Villain, be sure you prove." &c., of the elder Kean's Othello; "opined" that Lady Macbeth was a character precisely suited to her genius, and hoped that, at no very distant date, she would favour the town with an exposition of This high sounding criticism, however, was more calculated to create merriment than admi-The secrets of journalism are not well ration. kept in small towns, and it was known that the auctioneer's clerk who did the dramatic notices in the Stonebury Gazette, and who occasionally figured in its Poets' Corner, under the signature of "A Might-have-been," was desperately smitten Everybody who knew with Miss Steperson. anything of such matters at all was aware that she was the dash of most of his "Verses to ----:" that it was she who was "The dark-eyed, blackhaired houri" of his poem, "Waking Dreams," and the subject of his verses, entitled, "She's loved, Still she was a pretty fair but knows it not." actress, and many people wondered why she did not go on the stage, but the wonderers did not know so much about the stage as she did. practical knowledge that she gained through her father's connexion with things theatrical acted as a corrective to local newspaper or personal praise. Whatever the enamoured auctioneer's assistant might write, or gushing friends say about her acting, she was perfectly aware that she would never have risen higher in the profession than an 17 VOL. I.

average provincial leading lady, and her present position was a much better one than that. father and she made a good deal of money: their establishment, which, in addition to the dwellinghouse, included a large dancing-room, and storehouses for the monster marquees, &c., was their own freehold, and they had other household They had money in the Bank, lived property. in very comfortable style, and drove the hand-Like her father, Miss somest trap in the town. Steperson was very industrious and energetic. She assisted him in his business—his busy season being her slack one; and she entirely managed the dancing academy-managed it in a manner that was alike profitable and creditable to herself. Her shilling assemblies, which were held three nights a week during the winter months, were always well attended, and were really select; and the same could be said of her long quadrille nights. of which she gave three each season, the admission upon these occasions being, gentlemen three, ladies two shillings. Her juvenile and adult classes were alike successful: she had a large private-pupil connexion, and her annual benefit ball at the Music Hall was one of the events of the year—an event which put a strain upon the cab supplying capabilities of Stonebury, and drew a crowd of idlers to watch the arrival of, and pass comments —not always of complimentary character—upon The profits of the dancing business the dancers.

were solely hers, and it was known that she was worth a bit of money. She was three-and-twenty, and though a handsome, dashing, Mrs. Grundydefying girl, no word of scandal had ever been coupled with her name; so that, all things considered, "they" were not very far from the truth in saving that she had had plenty of chances to marry. But she had not accepted any of these chances, and she acknowledged no lover. had, however, a large circle of gentlemen acquaintances, and one gentleman friend -Charley Thompson. They were really friends There had been no falling and nothing more. in love at first sight between them, and by the time they had become intimate, each knew sufficient of the other's circumstances to be aware that any prudential love-making tending to matrimony was out of the question. Still each saw much in the other that they liked, and they became fast friends. She was pleased with Charley's lively good-humoured way, and he admired her self-reliance, sense, and dash. She was glad to have a male friend who did not embarrass her by turning lover; and Charley, who delighted in female society, was happy in being for once able to associate freely with a handsome girl without getting lackadaisical, or experiencing any of that vacillation of feeling which led him to believe. and give expression to his belief, that he was in love with one girl just because t'other dear

charmer happened to be away—a vacillation of which, whenever he thought seriously of it, he was really ashamed.

Friendships like this are, it must be confessed, very rare—so rare that the great un-get-at-able "theys" refuse to believe in their existence. The "they" of Stonebury said at first that Charley was "sticking-up" to Miss Steperson; that it was like his cheek to do so, but he would find his mistake out. Later, when he was found to be in high favour with her, "they" changed their tone, saying that it seemed Miss Steperson was going to make a fool of herself, after all; that it would be a good job for Charley any way; that he would be able to live without work, which was evidently what he wanted to do. was aware that this sort of talk went on, and that Fanny Mason had heard it; and though at one time he would have cared very little for that. and tried to persuade himself that such was still his feeling, the fact was that such things as these had, since the coming-of-age party, given him pause when speaking to Fanny. When he had said to her "I'm going into The Limes," he had spoken in a tone which, with a half-conscious intention perhaps, clearly conveyed the impression to her mind that he was going alone: at any rate he had not thought it necessary to mention that he was going there to meet Miss Such, however, was the case. Steperson.

had received a note from her that morning, running—

"Dear Charley,—I have been wanting to have a chat with you for some time past, but have not been able to catch sight of you. I shall be in The Limes this evening, and dare say I shall drop across you there. If I don't, will you call at our place on Monday evening?"

Charley quite understood that this was really a friendly command, meaning, "Meet me in The Limes, if you can," and, as he could, he was going to do so. Miss Steperson was the person he had been thinking of when he had spoken of the likelihood of his coming in contact with somebody from whom he might be able to obtain reliable information as to Harry Mason's relations with Queen Kate.

Small towns as well as large ones have their sights, and in this respect Stonebury was peculiarly rich—so rich, in fact, that it had an illustrated shilling Guide Book in a second edition. Its Abbey and Castle were not the only historic buildings it could boast of, and its public places were adorned by monumental statues of Stoneyshire worthies who had done the State someservice. But the sight in which the inhabitants most delighted, the one they were most proud to show, was "The Limes;" and here, as in the case of the

Beacon Hill, the native pride was justifiable. The Limes was undoubtedly one of the finest "You haven't got promenades in the kingdom. a place like this?" a native guide would say to a visitor from some dockey or warehousey commercial town; and the stranger, as he glanced along the magnificent lime-tree avenues, or looked up to the natural canopy formed by their interwoven branches, was fain to confess that they. meaning himself and his fellow townsmen, had not. "But if we had, though," he would usually add. "we would make a great deal more of it than you do." This was in allusion to the unkept, unparklike condition of the land intersected by the walks; but then you could not reasonably expect a town that had not vet advanced sufficiently far in the useful to have built a market, to attempt the beautiful in the lavingout of a park. The natural beauties and advantages of The Limes, however, were very great. The chief avenue, which was upwards of five hundred yards in length, lay along the bank of the river, and for promenading purposes formed a double walk, the outer row of trees shading the broad gravelled towing-path as well as the avenue proper. Running from either end and the middle of the great walk were branch ones leading into the town, which could also be reached by bridle paths through the meadows which occupied the space between the walks. At this

point the river ran deep and clear, and the high but softly sloping and thickly herbaged banks on the other side formed natural terraces that were dotted here and there by large chestnut-trees, around whose trunks were fixed rough wooden seats, on which the old, old story had doubtless been told many a time and oft, as they were chiefly affected by lovers. A pretty spot truly was The Limes, and a right pleasant one withal. Pleasant in the early mornings, when systematic old people walked there for their constitutionals, and unsystematic and love-sick young ones wandered up and down reading poetry, or, in the case of the males, practising on the cornet. Pleasant in the afternoon, when the nursemaids were in possession, and the glare of the sun was shut out by the leafy archway. Pleasant in the evening. when those who had been at business sauntered about its alleys exchanging friendly greetings or indulging in unfriendly comments as they passed each other, or the groups seated on the benches placed at intervals between the trees in the great avenue. Pleasant at all these times, but perhaps most pleasant and certainly prettiest on Band Saturdays. On these occasions "everybody who was anybody," or who wished to be taken for somebody, turned out. This class promenaded and practised gentility upon each other, while the non-genteel formed a circle round the Bandstand, and children capered in the meadows, making dance music of everything for the occasion. With these human accessories giving animation to the scene, with the dresses of the ladies glinting in and out among the trees, and pleasure-boats gliding up and down the river, The Limes presented a picture such as a Watteau would have loved to paint. It was a picture that charmed even inartistic spectators, and the soft, voluptuous swell of the music, modified by yet rising above the murmurous rustle of the trees, seemed to tone the mind to the enjoyment of it.

Charley Thompson, who had a rather contemptuous opinion of many things that the Stoneburyites highly esteemed, freely admitted the general glories of The Limes, and the particular brilliance of its Band assemblies; and as he entered it on this particular Saturday he thought that he had never seen it presenting a more charming appearance either in its general or special features. Without being oppressively hot the evening was sufficiently warm to make the shade grateful and the wearing of bright summer dresses the rule. As it was the last Band Saturday of the season, there was an unusually large concourse of promenaders, conspicuous among whom were a strong array of Bentley's young ladies, who sauntered about by ones, by twos, by threes, attended on, or followed by the young men who "went after them," and

who occasionally cast defiant or triumphant glances upon each other. As he passed along the main avenue, Charley exchanged nods, smiles, and how do's with a number of the girls and their admirers, but he made no stop till he was met by a group consisting of the Dauntless Three, with Georgey Clayton in attendance, and then he was brought up by Tilly Smith exclaiming—

"Well, you haven't altered much, Charley; I

knew you again in a minute."

"Oh, come now, Tilly, draw it mild," answered Charley. "I'm not such a stranger as all that. I've been giving my mind to boating lately, I'll acknowledge; but if you charmers have been lost to sight, you've been to memory dear."

"I suppose that's the language of the poets that you talk about," said another of the girls,

laughing.

"It is," answered Charley; "and I'm glad to find you've got such a good ear for it."

"Well, I don't know," said Tilly, bringing back the conversation to her text; "this is the first time I've seen you since the picnic; at least, I just saw you once in High Street, but you took no notice of me, and so I put it down that you had got above speaking to poor folks since you had taken to wear that spicy boating-cap."

"I didn't see you; but as you saw me and didn't speak, I should say it was you that was getting proud."

"Oh, I had some one with me."

"Well, I shouldn't have wanted to cut his throat, Tilly; at least, not then, though I suppose I shall have to be going in for something in that line; I shall soon be with ye once again."

"More language of the poets, ladies," said Georgey Clayton, in the manner of a showman.

"Yes," said Charley, and then by way of bringing the discourse round to the subject on which he was anxious to obtain information, he added, "but they want Harry Mason to give them the flowery in style."

"Oh, he keeps all his flowery talk for Kate," said the one of the Three who had not hitherto spoken; "you'll have to cut his throat if you want to do the attentive to her again."

"Well, I've heard that he's got to be head man with her," said Charley; "but, bless you, my dears! Kate will be wanting to change her gentleman-in-waiting by this time."

"Ah, but he's something more than a gentleman-in-waiting, Charley," said Tilly: "it's a case of the 'regular dustman' this time, and all the gentlemen-in-waiting have got the go-by."

"Oh, I didn't think that that was the state of the poll," said Charley.

"But it is, though," said she who had first mentioned Kate. "I don't suppose it's come to name the day, and I happen to know that he's not been to

her father's yet, but any one can see that it's coming to that; eh, Tilly?"

"No, but is that correct, Tilly?" said Georgey Clayton, to whom the information was much more astonishing than it had even been to Charley; "or are you only having a hack at her? You know you and her don't hit it off very well sometimes."

"Oh, thank you for the compliment, Mr. Clayton," said Tilly, with an indignant toss of the head; "but I'd have you to know that if I do have a word or two with Kate now and again, I don't tell lies about her. What I and my friend have said is correct, and it's no secret either."

"No, that it isn't," said the other girl, cutting in promptly as Clayton was about to speak. "Kate makes no secret of it herself. Before she had known him many weeks it was 'my young gentleman,' and now it's 'my Harry,' and my Harry is somebody, I can tell you. We can hear about how finely my Harry can speak at meetings in the shop, and what a deal the gentlemen at the Debating Society think of him, and how nicely he can talk, and what beautiful letters he can write. And if my Harry is only a working man, he isn't a mere common one, and he isn't going to be all his life in the shop."

"By Jingo! she's got the straight tip, Georgey," said Charley, with a meaning smile.

"She has so," answered Georgey; then he explained to Tilly that he had not intended to offend her, and she replied that it was all right.

"Is Harry here?" asked Charley, after a short pause.

"Is he here!" exclaimed Clayton. "Ah well, I'll forgive you, for after all, I suppose the trees don't prate of his whereabouts; but he is here, and on more than a life-size scale too. However, you'll see him; he'll be down this way again presently."

"Why, what's up?"

"Well," answered Georgey, "he's got Kate on one side him, and Miss Steperson—dressed within an inch of her life in pale green silk dress and jacket, a dazzling hat, and bronzed kid boots—on the other; and he's figuring away between them in a style suggestive of The Limes being only part of his property. I think I could name another beside Kate who thinks her Harry is not a mere common workman."

"Yes; and he isn't doing it just by way of a bit of bounce, or for a lark, as either of you two might do," said Tilly, "but because he fancies himself, and thinks the extra grand becomes him. Miss Steperson has never been with him before, and I can tell she wishes she wasn't now. She can see how people are taking stock and sneering, if he can't."

"Well, I have to see her, and that'll be an

excuse for her leaving Kate if she's that uncomfortable," said Charley.

"Here they come round the bend," said Clavton; and Charley, looking along the path, saw them approaching; Harry stepping jauntily along between the girls, swinging Kate's parasol, and turning about from side to side, evidently devoting all his energies to keeping up a constant stream of smart, smile-producing small talk. His manner, Miss Steperson's dress, and the fact that both she and Kate were in their respective ways notable personages, caused the trio to be the observed of all observers, and, as Tilly had indicated, the sneered at of a great many sneerers. But Harry was so engrossed with his own proceedings, so proud of his position, so happy in his fool's paradise, that he was only instinctively conscious that he was attracting a great deal of notice, and he took it for granted that admiration or envy were the sole feelings with which lookers-on regarded him. It would never have occurred to him that at such a moment Charley Thompson could have looked upon him with an angry contempt, in which there was no shade of jealousy. This, however, was precisely what Charley was doing.

"Well, he's a pretty picture," said Charley to Clayton, as they stood a little aside from the girls. "He looks very like a fellow that's being kept on here specially to help his mother, doesn't he? He might have a little discretion, if it was only on her account. Just now it'll be that it's her that's spoilt him; that she encourages him in his foppery, and so forth—that's about all that she'll get by him."

"He's making a regular fool of himself, any way," said Georgey. "I wonder Kate can stand him."

"Oh, as far as that goes," says Charley, "he's a smart-looking young fellow, and we know how he is likely to do the talkee-talkee, especially when he's spoony. Beside, it appears he has quite persuaded her that he's going to make himself a big man."

"Well, you know, Charley, he's a good deal thought of, and he is clever."

"Don't think I want to run him down, mate; there's power in him I know, but he wants regulating. If he's left to himself he'll take too big a load on, and when he comes to the inclines he'll either be brought to a dead stop or run off the rails trying to force himself up. I've known two or three that have started on the same line as he means going upon, and they've all come to grief through underrating the steepness of their inclines, and overrating their own power. You can't have passenger speed and goods power in the same engine."

"Not without you drop upon some new principle."

"Well, Harry hasn't dropped across any new

principle: his motive power is 'gab;' and to be of any great use for his purpose that should be accompanied by tact and freedom of action; and it strikes me that he's sadly deficient in tact, and it's very evident he is going the right way to deprive himself of freedom of action. In fact, the best thing any one could do for Harry now would be to get him the sack: he's doing no good for those at home, and a bit of knocking about the country would take some of the d—d conceit and selfishness out of him, and that's what's wanted for his complaint. However, here he is, so I'll just say good evening to the girls here, and then relieve Miss Steperson."

"Holloa! here he is! The return of the wanderer!" exclaimed Harry Mason as Charley stepped out into the middle of the path in front of him. "How are you, old fellow?"

"Oh, all right," answered Charley, as he shook hands with the girls, then, turning to Kate, he asked—"And how are you, Kate?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Charley," she answered.

"Well, I should have thought you would have said that you were a good deal better for seeing me," said Charley, laughing. "It's some time since you had that treat before."

"Oh, I've often been inquiring about you."

"Who from?"

"Harry, here," she answered, with a slight blush.

- "Yes; I suppose you've seen him pretty often lately?"
- "Well, occasionally," said Harry, with a selfcomplacent smile.
- "Did you get my note, Charley?" asked Miss Steperson, with just a touch of impatience in her tone.
- "I did," answered Charley; "and here I am in consequence, prepared to chat till further orders."
- "Well, it's business affairs I want to talk to you about," she said, "so we'd better go up one of the side walks out of the crowd."
- "Very well," said Charley; and then they bid the other two good evening, and turned off towards a branch avenue.
- "Well, Charley, I never was so pleased to see you before as I was this evening," said Miss Steperson when they were out of the thick of the throng. "As soon as I met Kate I told her I had just come for a stroll about and was expecting you, and so I couldn't decently get away till you came; and haven't I been disgusted with that fellow's self-conceit, that's all."
- "Why, what's the matter with him?" asked Charley.
- "Oh, you know what's the matter. I can stand a bit of gape-seed, but I don't like it when it's mixed with chaff. I could see the grinning and sneering."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Carry, so could I, and I wonder Kate couldn't; but they say she's seriously in love with him, and that makes all the difference."

Miss Steperson, who was a self-respecting as well as a self-reliant girl, considered it necessary to her position to insist upon the "Miss" from her male acquaintances, to whom she always gave the "Mr.;" but Charley, who though less than a lover was more than an acquaintance, was privileged to address her as "Carry."

"Well," she said, in reply to Charley's last observation, "if he has as much I in his heart as he has in his talk, I can only say that I'm sorry for Kate if she's as fond of him as the other girls say; though, for my part, I have an idea that she only fancies she is."

"Why, has she said anything to you?"

"Oh no, only I think so in a general way, and from having known her a long time. However, never mind that now, I want to talk to you about business. You know that the end of the Band season is about the beginning of mine, and I want you to lend me a hand in giving it a good start."

"All right, Carry; I'll beat up the talent for you; and if the first assembly isn't a good one, you blame me."

"Well, it was with a view to beating-up, as you call it, that I asked you to meet me here.

Most of my regular set are here; and just now, if you like, we'll take a turn along the main walk and speak to those of them we meet."

"That's a very good notion," said Charley; "but of course we're a very good business couple."

"But that's not all I want you to do, Charley; I've set you down for one of the stewards on my first long quadrille night. It will be all right, I suppose?"

The stewards of the long quadrille nights were two gentlemen selected to assist Miss Steperson in carrying out those nights; their qualifications being a personal acquaintance with the regular frequenters of the assemblies and with the dances which they liked or were proficient in, together with such a knowledge of the feeling of friendship, enmity, or rivalry existing among them at the moment, as would obviate any special unpleasantness in the arrangement of sets or introduction of partners. Hitherto the office had been exclusively trusted to Bentley's young gentlemen, and there was consequently a tinge of surprise in the tone in which Charley answered—

"Oh yes! it'll be right enough, if you think I'll do for the berth."

"That's just what I do think!" she answered.
"What with you and Clayton, and the others from the works, and the clerks from the station and warehouses, the railway set is nearly as large as the shopman one, and so in future I'm going

to have a steward from each, and you stand best with the one set and Mr. Parker with the other."

"Mr. Parker!" exclaimed Charley. "Now you have made a mistake, Carry. He wont act with me; he looks upon me as an embodiment of the insolence of the lower orders."

"It's you that's making a mistake, Charley," she answered. "I've sounded him on that point, and find he feels quite brotherly towards you. He looks upon you as a fellow victim to Kate's fickleness. It's Mr. Mason that's the hated rival now."

"Oh! that's all right then," said Charley; "and now let us get down to the Band again."

In the main avenue they met and spoke to a number of the habitués of the Steperson assemblies, and among them Mr. Parker, who was very friendly not to say fussy about Charley, expressing regret at not having seen him before since the picnic, and delight at hearing that he was to have him as his fellow steward.

"Well, look here, Charley," said Miss Steperson, when they reached the door of her house, still talking of dancing affairs, "Kate's coming to have a cup of tea with me on Monday afternoon, and you had better drop in, in the evening, and then we'll settle matters properly."

"Very well," said Charley. "And now you look here, quietly, Carry. I should just like to

know how things are between Kate and Harry."

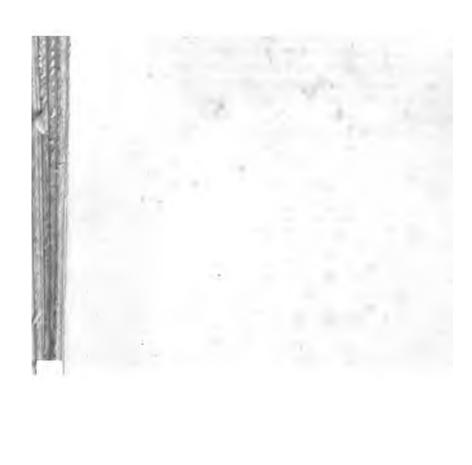
"What! jealous?" she asked.

- "Oh no," he answered: then seeing that she received his denial with a rather incredulous smile, he went on in a more emphatic tone, "No, upon my word. I dare say if I was with Kate for half an hour I should get soft about her again; but it's no feeling of that sort that makes me speak now. The fact is, I have particular reasons for wishing to know whether or not there's anything serious between them—in a word, whether they mean marriage."
 - "And I'm to quiz Kate, eh?"
- "Oh no; at least, not unfairly; but you and she will very likely touch upon the subject in a general way, and you might tell me afterwards what you thought."
- "Well, so far as that goes I wouldn't mind; and I may as well confess that I am a little curious about the matter myself. But what's your opinion?"
- "I think he means business, and I feel sure that if they were to marry it would be a bad job for all concerned."
- "Well, I should fancy myself that they would hardly be likely to live happy ever afterwards."
- "Not on thirty shillings a week, any way," said Charley, laughing; and then with a "You

mind and come now," from Miss Steperson, they parted.

"Well," thought Charley as he sauntered off by himself, "I wont say anything to his mother till after Monday, but I can see already that the land doesn't lie at all nicely. Master Harry has got himself among the breakers, and it wont be his fault if he isn't wrecked. If he was to go wrong, and with his and Kate's genteel notions put together, he'd be very likely to do so if he got a chance—it would about kill Fan. Poor little Fan—hang it! she's worth all Bentley's lot put together."

END OF VOL. 1.



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